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American Men of Letters

WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

Wm H. Prescott

American Men of Letters

WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

BY

GOLLO OGDEN

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1904

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Published April 1904

To S. M. O.

"Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also."

PREFACE

THIS volume makes no pretense of supplanting Ticknor's "Life of Prescott." It aims simply to supplement it. Ticknor wrote the biography of his lifelong friend, possessed of ample materials; but he was already an old man; his view of society and literature, always severe, had deepened into something like austerity; and to bring out vividly the playful and engagingly human aspects of Prescott's character would doubtless have seemed to him like taking liberties with the Muse of History. To complete and correct the picture of Prescott's personality, while giving a condensed but connected account of his life and work, has been the sole task undertaken by the present writer. Use has been made of significant matter rejected by Ticknor, or unknown to him, though his work has also been drawn upon occasion-

ally. The author could have had no hope of success but for the kindness with which the Prescott papers were put at his disposal by Mrs. Roger Wolcott and Linzee Prescott, Esq., the historian's grandchildren. To them his warmest acknowledgments are due.

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WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

CHAPTER I

THE CROSSED SWORDS

THACKERAY brought the Prescott pedigree into the high relief of a work of imagination. His allusion in "The Virginians" to the "crossed swords on the library wall of one of the most famous writers of America" pleased the historian. Mrs. Ritchie has printed his note of acknowledgment: "It was very prettily done, and I take it very kind of you." This was in 1857. When Prescott was in England in 1850, it appears from his letters home that he, like many another man, had been "not much impressed by Thackeray" in general society. But in this country they were drawn to each other. Even had they not been, Prescott

could not have failed to be touched by the "compliment to my two swords of Bunker's Hill memory, and their unworthy proprietor," since he always felt, as he wrote to Griswold in 1845, that he had a "right to take an honest pride, or at least satisfaction, in my descent."

The official genealogist of the family is William Prescott, of Concord, N. H., who published the "Prescott Memorial" in 1870. There were "two separate and distinct emigrants by the name of Prescott." John Prescott reached Boston and Watertown in 1640, and James Prescott was "first heard of at Hampton, N. H., in 1665." Both these Prescotts are traced back to "James Prescott of Standish, in Lancashire, England, who was required by an order of Queen Elizabeth, dated August, 1564, to keep in readiness horsemen and armor." It must be said, however, that this English connection is not made out by evidence satisfactory to the severe methods of later genealogists. Reviewing the "Prescott Memorial" in the "American Genealogist," the late Mr. W. H. Whitmore wrote: "Our objection is to the English part of the pedi-

gree. . . . Not a single proof is given." Indeed, the "Memorial" abounds in simplicities like the following: "Although we are not able to trace the direct lineage of the Prescotts that came to America farther back than the time of Queen Elizabeth, yet it is well known that Prescott was known as an ancient family in the town of Prescott in the county of Lancaster." Nobility in the ancestry is even hinted at, and a coat of arms is given. But on all this, two youthful letters of the historian's throw a somewhat amusing light. Writing to his parents from St. Michael's, March 15, 1816, he said: —

"I intend to have the family *arms* engraven in London. I wish you would send me a facsimile of them, which may be easily obtained from Dr. P., for I am acquainted only with the crest; and as people of the same name often have the same crest, but different bearings, I might confound my genealogical tree with some other, which would be a great pity, as I should wish to ascertain

'if our blood,
Has crept through scoundrels, ever since the flood,'

or if it has not flowed through some more illustrious channels. There is something extremely ominous in the crest, which you know is the bird of night."

On June 7 of the same year, however, Prescott wrote from London: —

"I have been to the Herald's Office, and, to my utter consternation, they tell me there is no such crest as an owl in their books, although there is a Sir John or Sir Alex, or some other baroneted Prescott now extant in London. I begin to be seriously afraid we have not the least blood royal in us."

Though thus left hanging, the English derivation is undoubted. It was tacitly assumed by Captain Henry Prescott, R. N., Governor of Newfoundland, who on February 25, 1840, wrote to Prescott to say that he congratulated himself upon seeing his family name raised to literary distinction by the historian, and surmised that he might trace his own ancestry to a common stock with Prescott's "in no very distant past."

Even once safely in New England, a mythic element seems to attach to the Prescott an-

nals. Wondrous tales are told of the emigrant John. Established on the frontier in Lancaster, he fought the Indians in a full coat of mail-armor, — helmet, cuirass, and gorget, — and "struck terror to the savage foe by an appearance more frightful than their own." Piquant tradition of his extraordinary personal prowess has been handed down in the Prescott family. He was one of those "soldier ancestors" to whom Governor Roger Wolcott referred in his privately printed "Brief Sketch" of Prescott, as helping to determine the historian's character and possibly his themes. Certainly it is no abrupt transition from the adventurous Cromwellian Indian fighter, John Prescott of Lancaster, to Hernan Cortes and his Aztec antagonists.

The line of descent is through Jonas Prescott, son of the first emigrant, 1648–1723. He lived in Groton. From him sprang Benjamin, who rose to be colonel of militia for his county, as also for the adjoining county of Worcester, and who, as a member of the General Court of the Colony, appeared before a royal commission in behalf of the territorial

rights of Massachusetts as against New Hampshire in 1737. He died the next year at the age of forty-one, — prematurely, for a long-lived stock. Second of his sons, and grandfather of the historian, was that William Prescott — Prescott the Brave, Washington called him — whose name blazed up in glory at Bunker Hill. Born in 1726, he pushed out before he was of age into what was then the wilds of upper Middlesex, and acquired lands in the township of Pepperell, as it came later to be named, after the captor of Louisburg. Hence the estate so loved of the historian, still held in the family under the original Indian title. Colonel Prescott lived, like too many soldiers, in a more lavish style than his means admitted, so that his only child William, born August 19, 1762, had early to set about making his own way in the world. After three years at Dummer Academy he entered Harvard, where he graduated in 1783, and then supported himself by teaching at Beverly while studying law under Nathan Dane, who afterwards founded the law professorship at Cambridge. Admitted to the bar in 1787, he practiced his profession for

two years in Beverly, but removed to Salem in 1789, where he lived till 1808. In that year he made his home in Boston. Industrious and able, he rose steadily until it could be said of him, as Webster did at the time of his death, that "at the moment of his retirement from the bar of Massachusetts he stood at its head for legal learning and attainments."

Political honors were his for the taking, but nearly all of them he put aside. He sat in the Legislature as representative of Salem, and also as senator from the county of Essex; was a delegate to the famous Hartford Convention in 1814, and a useful member of the Constitutional Convention of Massachusetts in 1820–21; for a year (1818–19) served as Judge of the Common Pleas in Boston, though twice he refused an offered appointment to the bench of the Supreme Court of the State. Highly successful as a lawyer, he early paid off his father's debts and cleared the family property from all encumbrances, supporting his widowed mother (Abigail Hale) at Pepperell until her death at a great age in 1821. The fortune which Judge Prescott accumulated was

freely put at his son's disposal, and without it the historian's work would have been impossible. Between the two there was always a peculiarly close intimacy. Shortly after his father died, December 8, 1844, Prescott wrote to a friend a long letter in which he gave a sketch of Judge Prescott's life and a penetrating while tender appreciation of his character. A part of this is worth quoting for its inherent interest, as well as for its significance in point of heredity.

"The great characteristic of his moral nature was integrity. The least departure from truth was a thing he would have shrunk from, as tainting the soul. He had all the moral courage which is demanded for seeking out the right and steadily pursuing it. Yet he did not do this so as to make virtue unamiable. For he pursued his measures in a gentle conciliatory way that sought to spare the feelings of others, and to make the most liberal allowances for the infirmities of human nature. He was, indeed, severe to no one but himself in his judgments.

"His tastes were intellectual to a most ex-

traordinary degree. Books were the friends that furnished him with an inexhaustible fund of contentment. After his retirement from business, — a business which had occupied as many hours of every day, probably, for more than forty years, as ever engaged any practitioner at our bar, — he found abundant resources in his own library. This is rare. He would pursue systematic courses of reading and study, taking copious notes on such great questions in politics or morals as most interested him. And in these studies, that of theology had a conspicuous place, — theology in its most extended sense. He was particularly fond of history, and regularly provided himself with all the best publications, historical and biographical, from the English press, as well as our own. It was a sufficient relief to him to pass from the study of one subject to another. In lighter reading, as works of fiction, particularly in those directed to the analysis of character, he took great delight. But especially when that pleasure could be shared with the domestic circle. How constant a companion for many years was the evening novel, — the

novels of Scott, Miss Edgeworth, and the like, — if there are the like.

"The great charm of his character consisted in his sympathy for all around him, — his family, his friends. Their joys and their sorrows were part of his. For the young he kept up this sympathy in his latest years, and especially for those who manifested anything excellent, or promising to become so, in their moral or mental character. As he had great sagacity, extensive learning, high principle, chivalrous honor, love of truth, reverence for the Deity most unaffected and remarkable, he had the qualities which command reverence without forfeiting love. There are some whom we venerate for high talents or principles, who have not the attractions that secure our affections. But none approached him — however intimately — without mingled feelings of reverence and love. How much and tenderly he was beloved can be known only to those who have seen him round his own hearth. If the world were made of such noble natures, what a world would it be!"

In Pierce's "Life of Sumner" there is re-

cord of a conversation at dinner where were present, among others, Webster, Sumner, Ticknor, and Prescott. The subject of discussion was the question what most powerfully shaped men's characters and activities. Some said one thing, some another. "Mr. Prescott declared that a mother's influence was the most potent, and paid an eloquent tribute to the female sex in this relation." It was, doubtless, personal experience that spoke, for he had a remarkable mother. It was directly to her, Governor Wolcott thought, that he owed his "unfailing spirits." On the day she died, he spoke of her to Ticknor as an influence that had been "a guiding impulse" to him. Born Catherine Greene Hickling, she married the young lawyer of Salem, William Prescott, in 1793. The union was unbroken for fifty-one years, and she survived her husband eight years, dying at eighty-four in 1852. Her life was uneventful, though for many years she took an active part in the public charities of Boston; but, as her son wrote, it was her character that excited interest. Again we have the advantage of a picture of her beautiful

nature by his own pen. A few days after her death, which as Ticknor says was mourned in Boston as a "public loss," Prescott gave to a friend an estimate of his mother. It reads, in part, as follows: —

"My mother had a warm and sympathetic nature, a heart full of love, a hand open to charity. And her charity was not limited to the purse. It showed itself in a great indulgence to the frailties of others, as well as in sorrow for their distresses. She had, indeed, a generous nature, wishing ever to do good and to make those around her better.

"Her predominant trait was disinterestedness, as you well know, to an extent that, I think, you have rarely seen in any one. It was a perpetual spirit of self-sacrifice, yet so sweetly made that it seemed no sacrifice, but a pleasure to herself. Her talk, her actions, and her thoughts, evidently, were all occupied with the good, or in some way the happiness of others. Her physical strength was great, and she used it indefatigably in works of benevolence and mercy, — visiting the sick, comforting the dying, — and with all this possessing a fund of

good sense and good humor which made her enter cordially into the innocent gayeties of life. Her Christianity was not of the morose kind, and though she wept with those that weep, she entered as warmly into the joys of her fellow creatures.

"Though her reading in early life had been left much to her own direction, she had read a great deal more than was usual at her day; and the Shakespeare which she had when a girl, still in the bookcase at Pepperell, bears testimony on every page to her accurate perusal. It is the same with others of the old English writers, and through life, and to the last day of it, the love of reading and writing has been a chief solace of her hours when alone. One book was her study by day and by night, — the Scriptures. This was visible to those admitted to her privacy, for her piety was not of that ostentatious kind which commends itself to the notice of the world.

"She had great energy; and in the management of affairs she was very efficient. She showed this particularly in the straitened circumstances of early life. She was, however,

exempt from the obstinacy and the conceit which sometimes attaches to that class of characters whose success in action leads them to an overestimate of their own abilities. She was as free from vanity as from envy. Indeed, such feelings could not harbor in a heart so disinterested.

"She had the good fortune to be connected with a partner in life of a character admirably suited to her own, though little resembling it. They had some great points of resemblance, in their excellent understandings, soundness of principle, mild spirit of toleration, and generous regard for the welfare of others. How could such a union be otherwise than happy. After being thus united for more than half a century, she was left to go on her pilgrimage alone. Yet not alone, for she was surrounded by troops of friends, the poor as well as the rich, whom her virtues and her deeds of kindness had made for her. She had children, too, who cherished her, and who strove, while they could, to 'keep one parent from the sky.' — All this is past; and the beautiful remembrance of her good deeds alone remains to us. She

had errors, no doubt, — though I have not been long enough with her to find them out. If they are recorded above, sure I am they were not so numerous but that the recording angel will blot them out with a single tear!"

Seven children were born to Judge and Mrs. Prescott, but four of them died in infancy. Two sons and a daughter attained maturity. Of these the eldest was William Hickling Prescott, who was born at Salem, May 4, 1796.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

"I AM the only classmate of Mr. Prescott now present," said President Walker of Harvard, at the memorial meeting in honor of Prescott held by the Massachusetts Historical Society on February 1, 1859. "My recollections of him go back to our college days, when he stood among us one of the most joyous and light-hearted, in classic learning one of the most accomplished, without any enemies, with nothing but friends." This characterization is borne out by all the contemporary testimony now accessible. Ticknor got various accounts from intimates of the Prescott home in Salem, and all agree that the boy William had all of his mother's bright vivacity and his father's amiability. He was first taught at his mother's knee. Next we find him under, not a schoolmistress, but a school-*mother*, as she preferred to call herself, — that New Eng-

land gentlewoman, Miss Mehitable Higginson, whose school for the very young was patronized by the best families of Salem. At seven he was placed in "Master Knapp's" school, where he remained till his father's removal to Boston in 1808. All the traditions of his boyhood, which Ticknor piously gathered, make him out a merry lad, fonder of play than study, though with an inquisitive mind and ready memory which made it easy for him to learn. Prescott himself said that he could recall no period of his childhood when he did not love books; his reading being mainly of stories and romances which used to quicken his imagination so powerfully that he would cling to his mother and follow her about the house rather than be left alone with the creatures of his fancy. A sermon of Dr. Channing's to children spared the rod. "Mother, if I am ever a bad boy again, won't you set me to reading that sermon?"

In Boston, Prescott was in the half-school, half-home, of the Rev. Dr. Gardiner, rector of Trinity Church. In the library of that excellent scholar, a dozen boys got a thorough

grounding in the classics. There, too, began the lifelong friendship between Ticknor and Prescott, as also that intimacy between the historian and a son of his teacher, which was remarkably close and never broken. Prescott was fitting for Harvard, and confined himself to the purely required studies. A boy to-day coaching for his finals could not more definitely regard that time wasted which was spent upon unnecessary text-books. Yet there is evidence of some outside reading. The Boston Athenæum was then in its beginnings, and, in that day of book famine in New England, furnished stores inaccessible otherwise. John Quincy Adams, off for Russia, deposited his library of several thousand volumes in the Athenæum; and it was particularly among them that Prescott, through the favor of one of the proprietors, spent many hours of aimless reading. From it he carried away little except, as he acknowledged forty years later, a firm conviction that there were such things as books, with some faint dawnings of literary taste. But there are no records of precocity — no vision splendid. The boy was but such as his fellows,

— a trifle gayer by nature, perhaps, but mainly just the playful, prankish, "apple-eating animal" that we expect the normal male of twelve or fourteen to be. He entered Sophomore at Harvard in August, 1811. "It is certain," wrote Hillard in 1864, that Prescott "in later life did not look back upon his college career with unmingled satisfaction." There was nothing discreditable about it. It was simply not distinguished. The bright and sociable boy of sixteen did not at once become a mighty student. He himself, in those autobiographical notes which he sent to R. W. Griswold in 1845, and which the latter printed with some amusing variations in the "Prose Writers of America," said that at Harvard he "gave little attention to the mathematics and the sister sciences." However, "I employed my leisure in the study of my favorite authors. It was a matter of taste with me, but considering my subsequent occupations I have not found reason to regret it." On this college reading a ray of light is shed by the records of the Harvard Library. Prescott would appear to have drawn books only in his

Junior year. A list of the volumes charged to "Prescott 2nd" — there was an Aaron Prescott in his class — between February 26 and August 14, 1813, extends to but nine entries. He may have had books elsewhere, but these were all from the library. They cover "Condillac, Tom. 8, Œuvres de Voltaire, Tom. 5, Rollin's Ancient History, vol. 1 & 2, Wollaston Rel. Nat. and Mitford's Greece, vol. 1." In addition, and most notable by way of unconscious prophecy, was Watson's "Philip II," of which all three volumes were taken out on June 4, while on July 9, vols. 1 and 2 of the same writer's Philip III were charged. Fourteen years later, when pursuing his elaborate historical studies, Prescott again took up Watson, and, without a hint that he had ever turned the pages of that author before, set down in his private notes the critical opinion, "a meagre, unphilosophical chronicler of the richest period of Spanish history." This was sufficiently in accord with Richard Ford's judgment, who, in 1842, urged Prescott to write the life of Philip II, saying that it was "an almost virgin subject," since "the poor performance of Watson

is beneath notice;" and in 1855 wrote, "You have given us so much new and real history. Verily you are the most good-natured of men to praise that poor creature Watson whose nonsense you have extinguished."

Prescott's rank in college may fairly be inferred from his having been elected a member of the Phi Beta Kappa — an honor much valued by him — and assigned to recite an original Latin poem, "Ad Spem," at Commencement. Bancroft's memory made it, in his address on Prescott before the New York Historical Society in 1859, "a Latin ode that he had written to Spring;" at any rate, he accurately recalled first seeing Prescott in Cambridge at the latter's graduation in 1814. Commencement was a high day in those years, and the old meeting-house was crowded with well-known people from Boston. After the literary exercises, the graduates entertained their friends. The Prescotts spread a dinner for five hundred in a tent. No plainer proof of family pride in the son could be given. When the son's son graduated a generation later, Prescott wrote in his journal:

September 1, 1844. "Attended Commencement last Wednesday when Will took his degree. . . . It is just 30 years since I quitted Alma Mater. . . . It is worth remembering that Will occupied the same room in old Hollis which I occupied 30 years ago, and which his grandfather occupied about 30 years before me; three William Prescotts in three generations, and all alive to meet together in the same scene of boyish recollections." This family room at Harvard has been identified for me as "Hollis 11."

CHAPTER III

"LE TRAVAIL D'AVEUGLE"

THE "leading and controlling event" of Prescott's life was justly said by Hillard to be the accident which deprived him of sight in one eye, and which was soon followed by such an impairment of the vision of the other as to make his popular title, "the blind historian," no wide misnomer.

It was a student prank that destroyed his left eye. Leaving the table at commons one day in his Junior year, Prescott turned sharply to see what particular piece of skylarking the noise behind him indicated, and was caught full in the open eye by a crust of bread thrown after him with none but rollicking intent. The blow was a fearful one in its nervous effects, striking Prescott down as by a rifle bullet. No external mark, then or later, was left on the eye, but it was made instantly and incurably sightless. The oculists of the day called it

a paralysis of the retina. The patient soon recovered tone and spirits, and went back to enter into the kingdom of the learned with one eye, and did it gayly and triumphantly, as has been seen. Immediately after graduation, he began reading law in his father's office, and looked forward confidently to a career at the bar. But early in 1815 the shadow deepened upon him. He was seized with an obscure inflammation in the right eye. Its diagnosis long baffled the physicians, who only later determined it to be a case of acute rheumatism. For months he was entirely blind, and never again was he able to use the eye except with extreme caution, and for but short periods at a time. Intervals of complete blindness fell upon him with the frequent recurrence of his disease, — which often attacked him painfully in other parts of the body also, — and the fear of losing even the feeble and precarious sight remaining to him never left him as long as he lived.

The tradition of Prescott's total blindness was strengthened by the "Edinburgh Review." In its notice of the "Conquest of Mexico" it

spoke of the writer as having "been blind several years." "The next thing," wrote Prescott in his journal, "I shall hear of a subscription set on foot for the blind Yankee author. But I have written to the editor, Napier, to set it right, if he thinks it worth while." "I can't say I like to be called blind," he wrote to Colonel Aspinwall, at about the same date (May, 1845). "I have, it is true, but one eye; but that has done me some service, and, with fair usage, will, I trust, do me some more. I have been so troubled with inflammations that I have not been able to use it for months, and twice for several years together." The "Edinburgh" duly inserted a correction, but many went on believing that Prescott was, as he humorously protested that he was *not*, "high-gravel blind." Edward Everett wrote him from London, June 2, 1845: —

"I noticed the note in the 'Edinburgh Review' about your blindness, and I continually hear and as often contradict the same statement in conversation, but I do not always command belief. Sir John Hobhouse last Saturday evening insisted upon it you were as blind as a

mole, and, being a quiet man, I was obliged to let him have his own way."

Maria Edgeworth sighed over the "poor man," on the supposition that he was blind.

Oculists assured him that his eye would be adequate to all the ordinary purposes of life, if he would give up his literary labors. But Prescott quietly refused to pay the price. Holding himself to the strictest regimen, using every precaution that his own experience or the skill of physicians might suggest, he yet preferred the joys of his intellectual pursuits to the certainty of eyesight. Again and again we find him in his journals calmly contemplating the possibility of absolute blindness. Even then there was no regret or slackened resolution; only a weighing of the possibility of his being able to press on with his work when wholly dependent upon the eyes of others. So long as hearing remained to him he would not lose heart. "The obstacles," he wrote in his journal for October 4, 1830, "I do not believe to be insuperable, unless I become deaf as well as blind. . . . I can always (by hearing even) prepare and write twenty-five printed pages in

a month." This was constantly a last resort in his mind, and when, in his later years, his hearing did grow somewhat dull, his fear that he might be left both blind and deaf was sometimes haunting. As to the actual extent and effect of his disablement, a few of his own records are worth pages of description: —

January 16, 1831. "I can dispense entirely with my own eyes."

June 26, 1836. "The discouragements under which I have labored have nearly determined me, more than once, to abandon the enterprise. I met with a remark of Dr. Johnson on Milton at an early period, stating that the poet gave up his history of Britain, on becoming blind, since no one could pursue such investigations under such disadvantages. This remark of the great doctor confirmed me in the resolution to attempt the contrary. . . . I may perhaps, therefore, without vanity take some credit to myself for perseverance. I must not overstate the case, however, for certainly my eyes have not been high-gravel blind all the while."

March 24, 1846. "The last fortnight I have not read or written, in all, five minutes.

"My notes have been written by ear-work: snail-like progress."

November 1, 1846. "I reckon time by eyesight, as distances are now reckoned by railroads. There is about the same relative value of the two, in regard to speed."

In a letter to Augustin Thierry, who was entirely blind, dated July 10, 1847, Prescott says: "My own eyes have become very dim, so that I get not more than an hour or, at most, an hour and a half's use of them each day, and I fear for the future. But your example and your writings have taught me, I hope, — philosophy."

March 1, 1848. "The deplorable state of my eyes."

July 2, 1848. "If I could only have some use of eyes!"

July 9, 1848. "I use my eyes ten minutes at a time, for an hour a day. So I snail it along."

February 15, 1849. "How can I feel enthusiasm when limping like a blind beggar on foot? I must make my brains — somehow or other — save my eyes."

July 15, 1849. "Worked about three hours per diem, of which with my own eyes (grown very dim, alas!) about 30 minutes a day."

October 3, 1853. "Have been *quacking* again for my eyes."

It was not actually quacking, though Prescott suffered many things of many physicians. The real quack for him would have been Hermes in Zadig, with his solemn assurance: "If it had been the right eye I could have cured it, but the wounds of the left are incurable."

June 16, 1857. "I fight as — metaphorically speaking — Cervantes fought at Lepanto — with one hand crippled."

Yet there were compensations, even from the point of view of a literary man. For example: —

"My inability to read handwriting has saved me from many unprofitable hours which I used to spend in verbal hyper-criticism."

Another thing which Prescott's disability spared him was a part of the primary work of historical research. Delving in the archives was not for him. He transported them, in-

stead, to his own library. Able to employ competent European scholars, he had copies made of all the manuscripts that bore upon his subject, so that at his ease in Boston he could study the treasures of Simancas and the Vatican, Paris, Berlin, The Hague, and the British State Paper Office. Nearly all of the manuscript library which Prescott accumulated in this way went up in smoke, unfortunately, at the time of the Boston fire of 1872. How nicely he measured his strength against the obstacles, how coolly and comprehensively he planned his campaign, may be seen in an early letter of his to the American minister in Madrid, Hon. A. H. Everett: —

Boston, January 1, 1827.

My dear Sir, — I had just written my preceding letter to you when I received yours of the 16th of September last, which, from some impediment or other, has been more than three months on its passage to me. I cannot express my sense of your kindness in thus readily promoting my undertaking. Amid so many important public as well as personal concerns

which necessarily engage you I had no right to claim this, though I confess I did expect it. I entirely agree with you that it would be highly advantageous for me to visit Spain, and to dive into the arcana of those libraries which you say contain such ample stores of History; and I assure you that, as I am situated, no consideration of domestic ease would detain me a moment from an expedition which, after all, would not continue more than four or five months.

But the state of my eyes, or, rather, eye, — for I have the use of only one half of this valuable apparatus, — precludes the possibility of it. During the last year this has been sadly plagued with what the physicians are pleased to call a rheumatic inflammation, for which I am now under treatment from Dr. Jackson, under the general direction of Mr. Travers, an eminent oculist in England. I have always found traveling, with its necessary exposures, to be of infinite disservice to my eyes, and in this state of them particularly I dare not risk it. You will ask, with these disadvantages, how I can expect to succeed in my enterprise?

I answer that I hope always to have a partial use of my eyes, and, for the rest, an intelligent reader who is well acquainted with French, Spanish, and Latin will enable me to effect with my ears what other people do with their eyes. The only material inconvenience will be a necessarily more tedious and prolonged labor.

The foregoing letter is but an earnest of the coöperation which Prescott had all his life from American ministers and consuls in Europe. In addition, experts like Gayangos and Rich and Lembke ransacked the libraries and explored the archives for him, in such a way as to place him on an equality with the historical searchers who went in person down among the dead men. A compliment which Motley paid him, apropos of his "Philip II," puts this in clear light: —

"I am astonished at your omniscience. Nothing seems to escape you. Many a little trait of character, scrap of intelligence, or dab of scene-painting which I had kept in my most private pocket, thinking I had fished it out of unsunned depths, I find already in your pos-

session, and now of course spread all over the globe."

To aid him at home, Prescott had private secretaries to read to him, make notes for him, and to decipher and copy his noctographs. In this latter form, nearly all his writing was done. He first got an inkling of the contrivance when a youth in England. Thus we find him writing to his father and mother: —

LONDON, July 28, 1816.

. . . Last evening at Mrs. Delafield's, one of the charming families whom I visit on the most intimate footing, I heard of a new invented machine by which blind people were enabled to write. I have been before indebted to Mrs. D. for an ingenious candle screen. If this machine can be procured, you may depend upon it you will feel the effects of it.

And later: —

PARIS, August 24, 1816.

. . . You must excuse this writing dear Parents it is my *coup d'essai* with my machine for writing without looking, is doubtless almost illegible and filled with blunders,

as I have not seen a word of it; the invention however is certainly a very fortunate one for me, but the process is so tedious. . . .

In a letter to the publisher of "Homes of American Authors," Prescott himself gave a sufficiently clear account of his writing apparatus. His noctograph, he wrote, consisted of "a frame of the size of a common sheet of letter-paper, with brass wires inserted in it to correspond with the number of lines wanted. On one side of this frame is pasted a leaf of thin carbonated paper, such as is used to obtain duplicates. Instead of a pen, the writer makes use of a stylus, of ivory or agate, the latter better or harder. The great difficulties in the way of a blind man's writing in the usual manner arise from his not knowing when the ink is exhausted in his pen, and when his lines run into one another. Both these difficulties are obviated by this simple writing-case, which enables one to do his work as well in the dark as in the light." One of his noctograph frames is preserved at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Yet one difficulty remained. Prescott sometimes forgot to insert the sheet of paper, and then, as he once wrote, he would proceed for a page "in all the glow of composition" before he found that it was in vain. He alluded to this *contretemps* as one of the "whimsical distresses" of his method. The resulting manuscript, however, was very hard to make out. One of his secretaries, Mr. Robert Carter, who was engaged by Prescott in 1847, found assigned him as his first duty the making himself familiar with the noctograph writing. "I was appalled," he wrote afterwards, "by its appearance. It was nearly as illegible as so much shorthand. I could not make out the first line, or even the first word." This is fully confirmed by what Prescott wrote to R. W. Griswold in 1845. He said that the characters of his noctograph "might indeed pass for hieroglyphics, but they were deciphered by my secretaries. Yet my hair sometimes stood on end at the woeful blunders and misconceptions of the original which every now and then, escaping detection, found their way into the first proof of the printer." The noctograph

original of this very letter to Griswold, it may be added, is preserved among the Prescott papers, and itself is a fine example of his hieroglyphs. It contained a modest autobiographical sketch, of which Prescott said at the end, "I have talked freely to you at your own suggestion, and your own discrimination will lead you to select whatever you are willing to publish as coming from yourself of this long-winded argument concerning one who never before wrote a line about himself." Griswold had sought material for the condensed biography of Prescott, which he published in his "Prose Writers of America." It also appeared in Bentley's "Miscellany," and followed Prescott's notes very closely. Such a sentence as this was, of course, Griswold's own: "The chaste richness of his style could have resulted only from the happiest union of learning with genius." And in the editor's conscientious effort to make the story appear to "come from himself," one finds such a use of the original as this: "*I have heard him say* that his hair sometimes stood on end," etc. Perhaps it did again when this was read to him.

To compose by dictation was abhorrent to Prescott. Mr. Carter recorded the fact that the historian dictated his memoir of Pickering, but "did not like the method, and never again resorted to it when writing for the public." Prescott's own account of the matter was as follows: "Thierry, who is totally blind, urged me by all means to cultivate the habit of dictation, to which he had resorted; and James, the eminent novelist, who has adopted this habit, finds it favorable to facility in composition. But I am too long accustomed to my own way to change. And, to say truth, I never dictated a sentence in my life for publication without its falling so flat on my ear that I felt almost ashamed to send it to the press. I suppose it is habit."

CHAPTER IV

THE INWARD EYE

PRESCOTT'S partial blindness had not merely the outward effects before noted: it determined the whole course of his life, and had a powerful influence in shaping and beautifying his character. No one can read the remarkable record in his journals of the way in which he turned from a dim world without to a radiant world within, took himself in hand, and forged laboriously in the dark the tempered weapon of his mind and heart, without becoming persuaded that his strength was plucked from his very disabling. It was his resolute distilling out the soul of goodness in the things evil of his life which justified the Rev. N. L. Frothingham in saying of him, after his death, that the mischance which robbed him of eyesight could "hardly be called a calamity, so manfully, so sweetly, so wondrously did he not only endure it, but convert it to the highest

purposes of a faithful, scholarly, serviceable life." On Prescott's tomb, as on that of another gentle scholar and intrepid invalid of New England, might have been written, "Meine Trübsal war mein Glück."

In September of 1815, partly in pursuance of plans of travel, and partly in the hope of benefiting his health, Prescott sailed from Boston for the Azores. His maternal grandfather, Thomas Hickling, was then, and until his death at ninety-one, consul of the United States in the island of St. Michael's, and cordially welcomed the young American into his charming country house at Rosto de Caõ. The large family of children by a second wife, a lady native to the islands, gave Prescott most agreeable companions, and for six weeks he greatly enjoyed life in the tropics under the most favorable circumstances. But, on November 1, he was seized with a violent inflammation in the eye, and for three months was confined to a dark room, on a reducing diet. His single penciled entry in the diary which he was then beginning was, for the whole period extending from November 1 to February 1,

the one pathetic word "darkness." For a large part of the time it was absolute darkness. Yet his spirits were throughout unflagging. He was not merely cheerful: he was hilarious. He sang, and spouted poetry, and mouthed Latin, and walked scores of miles within the four walls of his large chamber, — from corner to corner, thrusting out his elbows to keep himself from running against the sharp angles. Indeed, as he wrote to his parents, he "emerged" from his "dungeon, not with the emaciated figure of a prisoner, but in the florid bloom of a *bon vivant*." A little later, when in London, he was told by the leading oculist whom he consulted that there was no hope of a permanent cure, and that, as he wrote home, "I must abandon my profession forever." But even that could not daunt him, and he added, "Do not think that I feel any despondency. . . . My spirits are full as high as my pulse; fifteen degrees above the proper temperament." In connection with this indomitable temper of Prescott's, with light-heartedness that never failed, may here be cited what his mother said, years after, to her pastor:

"This is the very room where William was shut up for so many months in utter darkness. In all that trying season, when so much had to be endured, and our hearts were ready to fail us for fear, I never in a single instance groped my way across the apartment to take my place at his side that he did not salute me with some hearty expression of good cheer, — as if we were the patients, and it was his place to comfort us."

The letters and journals which cover the residence at St. Michael's and the subsequent travels in Europe, 1815–1817, are meagre, but revealing. They show us the beginnings of the man that was to be. His extraordinarily warm family affection is there. His amiable, engaging, and eminently social nature appears, — sometimes with a characteristically whimsical turn, as in this entry in his St. Michael's diary for October 20, 1815: "Walk with Donna Maria, made love and learned Portuguese." There is a touch of the customary pedantry of the recent graduate in his frequent overflow of classic citations and allusions. But most striking of all is the evidence of a curious

and observant mind. His delight in the society of his aunt and cousins did not prevent him from inquiring into the agriculture and government of the Azores. Still more in detail, and with an eye keen beyond the wont of youth at twenty-one, did he scrutinize the productions of the soil and the civil institutions of those parts of England, France, and Italy through which he journeyed. One is almost reminded of Arthur Young and his beloved turnips. In the close and shrewd observations of these years do we get the clearest prophecy of the coming historian.

It is the making of the man, however, which is the immediate concern. The process lies open to us in Prescott's journals. Never was there a sharper reminder of the physical basis of life. It was his bodily crippling that gave Prescott an introspective habit. He watched himself like an experimenter. Every symptom he noted down. His diet he scrupulously recorded. His partition of the day — his hours of sleep; the time given to reading; the amount of exercise and recreation, with the effects of each; social amusements and the tax paid to

friendship, — all was written out and studied and commented upon for three rigorous years. It was not done selfishly, least of all morbidly. Prescott had a problem to solve. How could he do the work of a man without a man's eyesight? What regimen would maintain his necessarily limited activity at its highest and most continuous flow? What husbanding of the hours would make up for the handicap under which he must always labor? It was to answer those questions satisfactorily to himself that Prescott undertook his prolonged self-scrutiny and self-testing. He did it almost with scientific objectivity. He was as cool and unbiased as if writing of another. Not one hint of a diseased consciousness appears in the whole record. In this respect, I think, the literature of diaries may be searched in vain for a parallel. To put one's nature, physical and mental, under the microscope daily, yet to betray, not simply no morbid feeling, but almost no sense of self at all; to be calm, even jocose, while recording ill-health and noting limitations; to preserve a sunny temper while wrestling with the problem how to make a life bear

fruit in darkness; and to do all this in a series of records meant only for his own eye and his own guidance, — such was the high and unique achievement of Prescott.

While still in Europe he began mortifying the flesh. A Paris physician bade him never exceed two glasses of wine per diem. The story of a traveling companion was that Prescott at once seized upon the largest wine-glass on the table, to measure by. However that may be, we have in his own handwriting a register of his daily wine-drinking, covering a period of two years and nine months. It was no calendar of a sybarite. The effect on his eye was the one standard to which everything was referred. Thus when we find him writing, July 22, 1820, "Went to Nahant — drank too much wine in Boston," we know that he simply meant too much for his eye. Wine was prescribed for him; he found it useful; the only thing required was to work out a rule as to kind and quantity, and this he did with an amazing sort of impersonal zeal. And every other part or act of his daily life was interrogated in the same spirit and to the same

end. After months of minute inspection and full experiment, aiming at the correct regimen, he recorded the following: —

"Eat meat; light breakfasts; temperate dinners; light teas; *no* suppers; *simple* food; no great variety at dinner; exercise = 4 miles pr. day at 3 or 4 different times; light not intense, but full, clear; no spirits; no wine except excellent and old; not exceed 4 glasses of that, nor oftener than once in 5 days; read moderately large print, when eye is well; not walk in the cold or wind; no wine when I have a cold; no goggles? not sit up *late*."

A few disconnected extracts may further show the character of the entries: —

March 4, 1818. "Accursed cold — God's will be done!"

February 4, 1819. "A cold — engagement."

October 16, 1819. "Cold heightened by imprudence."

March 1, 1820. "Much hurt by injudicious reading."

January — , 1820. "N. B. Theatre, late Balls, smoking, supper parties, always pernicious — ergo, not go — or not stay late."

"Rule about balls. Not more than one a week, and not stay after 11, or more than 2½ h."

"Club, not stay after 12."

From the physical, Prescott's self-discipline passed on as rigorously to the mental and the moral. His athletic training of brain and pen for the peculiar work he gave them is reserved for a later page; but he read his soul as attentively as he did his mind or body. His habit was to keep by him a complete inventory of his moral qualities, — chiefly a list of the faults against which he set himself to strive. Slips written by his own hand, and seen by his eye alone, he kept in a large envelope, each one bearing a record of what he thought amiss in himself. Over this card-catalogue of defects he would periodically go, — usually on a Sunday morning after church, — and conscientiously check up his moral account. One besetting sin mastered, its record would be blotted out; a new one detected, it would have its scrupulous entry. To the last he kept up these recurring self-examinations, and after his death the envelope was found, marked, "To be burnt." To

ashes the whole was indeed reduced. Not enough to make a moment's blaze, — the faults of one so universally loved! "The only man," wrote Hillard, "whom we never heard any one speak against."

In the early journals there are some traces of the struggle of Prescott's spirit to find itself. A few of these may be properly transcribed: —

"Since the age of 23, the most wretched period of my life was when my *passions and temper controlled me*, the most happy, when I *controlled them*."

"Without answering for others, I may say that these qualities of mind are *sufficient for my happiness*: —

I. Good Nature. II. Manliness. III. Independence. IV. Industry. V. Honesty. VI. Cheerful Views. VII. Religious Confidence."

Finally, as if bursting into a "let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,"

"Voilà.

P. S. I have been perfectly contented, lighthearted & happy, ye last 2 weeks — with my BOOKS 7 hrs. & DOMESTIC SOCIETY — & Benev^{t} Feels (Not thinking of it) Not VANITY "

CHAPTER V

PREPARATION

To Prescott, as to "gentle Sir Philip Sidney," it might have been said, "thou knewest what belonged to a scholar; thou knewest what pains, what toil, what travail, conduct to perfection." The records of his rigid discipline from his twenty-sixth to his fortieth year remain as proof of what would otherwise seem, considering his handicap, the incredible amount of work he got through. With the sure prospect of indifferent health and dependence upon the eyes of another, he attacked light-heartedly a mass of reading which would have taxed the rudest physique. His toils, moreover, were undertaken through no necessity, — except the spur of a noble mind, — since his father's ample means assured him comfort and even luxury. But we find him, soon after his return from Europe in 1817, resolutely sitting down to perfect his Latin, and to make himself

master of three modern literatures. "I am now," he wrote in his journal early in 1822, "twenty-six years of age, nearly. By the time I am thirty, God willing, I propose, with what stock I have already on hand, to be a very well-read English scholar; to be acquainted with the classical and useful authors, prose and poetry, in Latin, French, and Italian, and especially in history; I do not mean a critical or profound acquaintance. The two following years, 31–32, I may hope to learn German, and to have read the classical German writers; and the translations, if my eye continues weak, of the Greek. And this is enough for general discipline." For German, he had to offer Spanish as a substitute. To his great regret and temporary deep depression, his feeble eyesight compelled him to give up the Gothic script. A secretary could make French or Spanish intelligible to him; but he found that, without a dangerous strain of his weak eye, he could not thoronghly acquire the language of the learned, which would have been so useful to him in his historical pursuits. Accordingly, after much deliberation

and long balancing of his strength against the obstacles, he decided that it was out of his reach. The remainder of his programme, however, he adhered to religiously and carried out triumphantly. Aided at first by his friend Gardiner and a devoted sister, who read to him hours every day, and later on by private secretaries, whom he began regularly to employ in 1824, he put an immense amount of material behind him. During several of those years of preparation, furthermore, Prescott had the good fortune to be able to use his eye without harm. Thus on January 24, 1829, we find the record: —

"By the blessing of Heaven I have been enabled to have the free use of my eyes in the day time during the preceding weeks without the exception of a single day, although deprived for nearly a fortnight of my habitual exercise. I trust I have not abused this great privilege."

In English, Prescott's reading was wide-ranging. The niceties of philology were not for him, though one of the heads of the "course of studies" which he marked out for himself

in October, 1821, was "Principles of grammar, correct writing, etc." His main strength he expended upon another section of his plan, namely, "Fine prose-writers of English from Roger Ascham to the present day, principally with reference to their mode of writing — not including historians, except as far as requisite for an acquaintance with style." His notebooks survive to tell the tale of his faithful performance of the task. Ascham, Sidney, Bacon, Browne, Raleigh, Milton; the great preachers; the old English drama; romances and ballads; historians and critics down to his contemporaries Jeffrey and Gifford, — all passed in review before him. Nor did the names and volumes stand to him as a mere catalogue. He read, marked, and inwardly digested. Not extracts, but critiques, fill his commonplace books. "This criticism and analysis," he wrote in June, 1823, "shall be made weekly, at each time reviewing it as a whole. . . . The reflections shall be made carefully, for it is obvious that superficial considerations are not worth recording, as the recollection of them can in no way add to the solid stores

of knowledge." Ticknor gave two specimens of Prescott's condensed characterizations, Ascham and Milton. I will add the one of Burke, remarkably near the white for so young a critic: —

"Splendid, fervent, very declamatory; a fiery imagination, following up his game with argument and illustration and emphasis, with a vehemence and rapidity that cannot be resisted. As declamatory as Bolingbroke, but more force, more of the 'vivida vis animi,' rather glowing with the force of his own impetuosity than with the studied embellishment of fancy. Borrowing his images, examples from the meanest sources, no matter where so long as they enforce his purpose, yet too redundant, even tedious."

French and Italian studies came next, and were equally generous. Into French literature he went, as he expressed it, "deeper and wider" than into Latin, since his object was not simply to strengthen his memory of old favorites, but to acquire a familiarity with an entire body of writers. From Froissart to Châteaubriand he covered the ground with

singular thoroughness. He collected material for the life of Molière which he at one time intended to write. Italian he pursued with more delight than French. His favorite quotations, in letters and in his journals, were from Italian poets. In company with Ticknor, and aided by an Italian scholar living an exile in Boston, he pushed his reading far beyond the beaten track, and at one time thought seriously of writing a history of Italian literature. The solidity of his attainments in this field may be measured by his two elaborate articles on Italian Poetry in the "North American Review" of October, 1824, and July, 1831. Spanish, Prescott took up through a happy accident of friendship. In his journal for February 13, 1825, he wrote: "I began the study of Spanish, December 1, 1824, since which period I have written daily exercises, studied grammar, read, etc." The prompting came through his fondness for Ticknor, who was then delivering in Harvard those lectures which afterwards grew into his monumental "History of Spanish Literature." Thus at more than twenty-eight Prescott began the

study of the language that was to bulk largest in his life's work. His knowledge of its literature early became extensive, and his collection of Spanish books ranked second after Ticknor's. He came to think and write in Spanish with great freedom, though his command of the language was not perfect: in the letters and entries in his journal which he wrote in Spanish there are occasional minor lapses. And, singularly enough, he did not at first find Spanish *simpático*. He wrote to his friend Bancroft at Christmas, 1824, "I am battling with the Spaniards this winter, but I have not the heart for it that I had for the Italians." He added, with an amusing unconsciousness of what his fate was to be, "I doubt whether there are many valuable things that the key of knowledge will unlock in that language!"

Prescott seems early to have felt a bent towards historical composition. About 1822 he wrote in his private memoranda, "History has always been a favorite study with me; and I have long looked forward to it as a subject on which I was, one day, to exercise my pen. . . .

But it requires time, and a long time, before the mind can be prepared for this department of writing. I think thirty-five years of age [he was then twenty-six] full soon enough to put pen to paper." The story of his quest of a congenial theme comes later; but here may be noted a few details of the methods he pursued in preparing for the work that awaited him. Discipline in industry and concentration of mind were among the ends which he earliest set before himself. Thus, on December 1, 1824, he wrote in his journal: "I have read with no method and very little diligence or spirit for three months [it was about the time of his dejection at having to give up German]. . . . To the end of my life I trust I shall be more avaricious of time [this phrase frequently dropped off Prescott's pen] and *never* put up with a smaller average than 7 hours intellectual occupation per diem." Six years later, May 13, 1830, he exhorted himself to "imitate the perseverance and literary ardor of the Germans. I must be avaricious of time as regards domestic pleasures." He was able to record progress in fixity of at-

tention. "I can think," he wrote on June 1, 1829, "in one place as well as another, and in company as well as alone. I can work rapidly in proportion to the concentration of my thoughts; I ought to be able to confine these to any given subject for eight or ten hours a day."

"Maxims in Composition" were given a place in the first of his journals, and were often recurred to. Some of these were of the mnemonic order.

In October, 1824, he elaborated twenty "Rules for Composition." In these a note of independence is firmly struck. "State with confidence what I know to be true." "Rely on myself for estimation and criticism of my composition." "Write what I think without affectation upon subjects I have examined." Withal, Prescott had a strong grasp on reality. He longed to saturate himself in matter. Thus on July 3, 1828, he said to himself, "Facts, facts, whether in the shape of incidents or opinions, are what I must rely upon." Yet later on he added, — what shows that he

was neither a logician of the "all-case" order, nor an artist who knew not what to leave out, — "Mem. Never introduce what is irrelevant or superfluous or unconnected for the sake of crowding in more facts."

Prescott's style, the care with which he built it up, and the conscientious attention he gave to every defect which his own critical eye or the acuteness of friend or reviewer could detect in it, may best be considered in connection with the writings themselves. But so much as has been given was necessary to show the temper in which he wrought during all those years preceding the time when, as Webster said of him, he "burst upon the world like a comet." Not the least important element in his preparation was his happy marriage. This took place on his twenty-fourth birthday, May 4, 1820. He married Susan, daughter of Thomas C. Amory and Hannah Linzee, his wife. It was a felicitous union, singularly helpful to Prescott. Long afterwards he wrote to a friend, "Contrary to the assertion of La Bruyère, — who somewhere says

that the most fortunate husband finds reason to regret his condition at least once in twenty-four hours, — I may truly say that I have found no such day in the quarter of a century that Providence has spared us to each other."

CHAPTER VI

BEGINNINGS

PRESCOTT'S first appearance in print was something of a frolic affair. "The Club-Room," of which he was editor, and which ran its course in four numbers, had its origin in a literary and social club, formed in 1818. Beginning with a small number of intimates, it rose to a membership of twenty-four, and for more than forty years was a pleasure and solace to Prescott. He was from the first its leading spirit. When the proposal came to print some of the papers read at the meetings, it was Prescott who suggested a periodical form of publication, and it was he who was appointed its editor. He undertook the function seriously enough, making a note in his journal of the names of those who agreed to furnish him "6 printed pages at a week's notice once in three weeks for the year 1820." But the dews of mortality as well as of youth were upon the

venture from the start, and its birth and burial were not too far apart to be recorded on a single page of Prescott's note-book. Here it is: —

"February 5, 1820. 'Club Room, No. I.' published containing:

Club-Room, Happiness, Recollections, Castle-building,
Warren. Parsons. Dexter. Ware.
500 copies.

"March 10th, 1820. 'Club Room, No. II.' published — containing 44 pages — Club-room — Lake George, Ennui — Village Grave-yard — Calais.

"April 26th, 1820. 'Club Room, No. III.' published containing 56 pages — Sea of y^e^ Poets. Sequel to Recollections. Travels. Memorial. Vale of Alleriat. Julietta Promeoni — price 45.

"July 19, 1820. 'Club Room, No. IV.' published containing 39 pages — Voyage of Discovery. Ruins of Rome — price 37½ cts.

"And here ended this precious publication."

Prescott's own contributions are three in number. One was the "Vale of Alleriat," a sentimental tale; another was "Calais," a trifle of a cleared-up ghost story, which the author states that he gives "as it was told to us," and which Ticknor informs us that Washington

Allston "used to tell with striking effect." This would imply that Allston had an extraordinary power of making the tame vivid. In the second number Prescott wrote the introductory article giving a whimsical account of the naming and purposes of the Club-Room. Referring to the search of the hero of La Mancha for "curious names" [this was four years before Prescott began Spanish], he says: —

"We had actually no less than seven meetings extraordinary to adjust a title for our paper. The Epicureans would have christened it Hotch-pot (the old English for pudding) containing, as Lord Lyttleton informs us, 'not one thing only, but one thing with many others together,' which by the variety of its ingredients would show forth the very nature of our work. But to this the Dyspeptics (a modern party who have gradually grown out of the former, and like many other colonies, now quarrel with the parent state) objected, from the persuasion that so gross a name must necessarily exclude it from all persons of delicate tastes — and digestion.

"The Cynics recommended 'Tales of the

Tub,' and the Peripatetics proposed 'Velocipede.' In this crisis, being, as usual, unanimously divided in our opinions, we determined to follow the example of the ancient Greeks, who when each man had voted himself the best general at the siege of Troy, wisely balloted for the second-best; and in precisely the same manner did we at length resolve upon the very ingenious name of the Club-Room.

"As this is the proper place we cannot refrain from felicitating both ourselves and the public upon the selection of so significant a title, which, we do assure them, is a careful translation from the Συμπόσιον of Xenophon, and was done into English by a learned Professor of the University, solely with a view to this publication" . . .

"Our book has been favored with the usual introductory compliments paid to works of merit upon their entrance into life; and has been denounced as both flat and stale, and some promising little critics have even discovered that we are downright imitators of Salmagundi and the Sketch Book. But all such reflections we put down to the account of sheer

ignorance and bad taste, to say no worse, and we recommend their authors to read deeper and grow wiser.

"We would caution any ignorant or malicious people against imagining this work to be the cream of our wits, for, in truth, it is nothing but the froth and overflowings of them, which, if they choose, they may scoop up, and if not, it may run to waste; we care not a groat."

More serious work followed. In 1821 Prescott began to contribute to the "North American Review," and for more than thirty years thereafter he rarely failed to produce what he called "my annual peppercorn for the Old North." From a memorandum of uncertain date, but probably written in 1820, is taken this account of his plans in regard to this form of literary activity, and his conception of the way in which it would fit into his general scheme. "I will write a review no oftener than once in three numbers of the 'No. American Review' — no *oftener*, and *print* only what I think will *add* to my reputation . . . In the interim I will follow a course of reading and make the subjects of my reviews, as far as I

can, fall in with this course, or with what I have before read. . . . Pursue this course till I am thirty . . . Mem. I will never engage to write for a number." For a time Prescott thought of seeking print in the more noted English reviews. Through Sparks he offered an article to the "Quarterly," and a letter from Lockhart, June 9, 1828, records the fact that the editor had "perused Mr. Prescott's essay, and prays that Mr. Sparks will tell him that he has pleasure in accepting it for the 'Quarterly Review.'" Lockhart also requested that Prescott would indicate subjects on which he might be asked to write other reviews. The article in question was that on the "Poetry and Romance of the Italians." Its publication was so long delayed, however, that Prescott finally reclaimed his manuscript and gave it to the "North American." It was there printed in 1831. Useful as Prescott's review-writing was to him, both as pen-practice and means of repute, he came later, like many an enfranchised hack, to have a poor opinion of it. In 1843 he wrote in his journal: "Criticism has got to be an old story. It is impossible for any one

who has done that sort of work himself to have any respect for it. How can one critic look another in the face without laughing?" After the date last mentioned he did no reviewing except at the behest of friendship. His charming friend and correspondent for many years, Madame Calderon de la Barca, had the advantage of a notice by Prescott of her vivacious "Travels in Mexico." In 1850 Ticknor's "Spanish Literature" claimed a similar tribute. On this subject the diary yields two extracts: —

September 12, 1849. "Now for the review — my last and only in this line, — though for the author's sake I shall do it *con amore*."

October 25, 1849. "Have read for and written an article in the 'North American Review' on my friend Ticknor's great work — my last effort in the critical line . . . Now, Muse of History, never more will I desert thy altar!"

He did, however, on a single occasion more, to wit: —

September 28, 1853. "Also written a notice of Hillard's 'Six Months in Italy' — thin

porridge — not the book, but my notice of it. It will make 10 pp. of my History in quantity — a column and a half of the 'National Intelligencer,' an' they will print it."

Making out once in his journal a list of all his review articles and fugitive contributions to literary periodicals, Prescott affixed the too contemptuous judgment, "This sort of ephemeral trash had better be forgotten by me as soon as possible." When, in 1845, his London publisher, Bentley, proposed a volume of Prescott's miscellaneous writings, — it appeared as "Critical and Historical Essays," — the author spoke of the matter as "trumpery" and a "*réchauffé* of old bones." However, he assented to their publication, muttering good-natured protests to himself and his correspondents. A few of his private entries will show his attitude of mind.

March 8, 1845. "Finished doctoring my old articles in the N. A. for Bentley. Have run them over very superficially. If they prove as hard reading to the public as to me, I pity them. But to me they are an old tale."

September 15, 1845. "Rec'd my vol. of

'Mis' from Bentley . . . As to the portrait of the author, it shows more imagination, I suspect, than anything in the book."

The American edition had the Harper imprint.

June 24, 1845. "I have made an agreement with the Harpers. . . . My portrait is to be prefixed thereto — which they consider, I suppose, putting a good face on the matter."

What Prescott himself rated so low need not long detain us. These early essays of his are plentifully bedewed with learning; they show us an author almost uniformly urbane and gentle; in them we can see his historical spirit preening its wings, and his historical style in the forming. Judged by the standards of the day, they are elegant specimens of leisurely reviewing. But for real criticism, deep insight into literature or life, vigorous comment, biting characterization, phrases that haunt the memory, one would turn to them in vain.

A just idea of Prescott's critical faculty, as compared with Carlyle's, may be had by setting over against each other the reviews of

Lockhart's "Scott" which the two men wrote. Both were published in the same year, 1838, Prescott's in the "North American," Carlyle's in the "London and Westminster Review." The American is flowing and refined; the Scotchman jerky and uncouth. Prescott debates whether Lockhart may be thought guilty of "occasionally exposing what a nice tenderness for the reputation of Scott should have led him to conceal." Carlyle exults that the book is no "vacuum biography," leaving its subject in "the white beatified-ghost condition." "How delicate decent is English biography, bless its mealy mouth!" Passing to personal judgment, Prescott ranks Scott among the greatest. "There is no man of historical celebrity that we now recall who combined, in so eminent a degree, the highest qualities of the moral, the intellectual, and the physical." As if in protest against such easy conferring of the laurel, the ruggeder Scot strives to measure his countryman more accurately: "It is good that there be a certain degree of precision in our epithets. It is good to understand, for one thing, that no popularity and open-

mouthed wonder of all the world, continued even for a long series of years, can make a man great," etc.

Even harder for Prescott to bear would be a comparison of his essay on Cervantes with Lowell's brief lecture on "Don Quixote." The earlier writer abounds in information. He gives an excellent biographical sketch of Cervantes. He enumerates all the editions of "Don Quixote," drawing from the editor of one of them, F. Sales, a letter expressing his "ineffable pleasure" at reading so masterly a review. All is high-bred and scholarly, but of criticism, strictly speaking, the essay is blameless. Lowell was able, for his address to workingmen, to draw from his scribblings on the margin of his own "Don Quixote" shrewder remarks and more illuminating comments than were dreamed of in Prescott's philosophy. In the later writer we see, what we do not in the earlier, learning subordinated to interpretation, and a creative work followed sympathetically by a creative mind. Prescott was primarily an historian; and luckily it could not be said of him, as it has been of no less a man

than Sainte-Beuve, that he was a writer *suicidé en critique.*

Along with these minor writings of Prescott may be conveniently grouped his "Life of Charles Brockden Brown" and his "Memoir of John Pickering." The former he undertook for the collection of American biographies edited by Jared Sparks. It was a slight but graceful bit of writing, which much exaggerates the merits of Brown, as Prescott himself, later in life, was the first to acknowledge. His private record shows the speed with which the work was done, and the author's view of it at the time.

July 14, 1833. "Began to write on Brown's life — at Nahant."

July 29, 1833. "Finished Brown's Life and Writings. Written at the rate of between 3 and 4 noctographs per day. I am afraid it will verify the proverb of 'easy writing,' etc. The subject proved not at all to my taste. . . . I could not have finished one of his novels unless as a job."

However, his editor was satisfied, witness the following letter: —

CAMBRIDGE, August 9, 1833.

DEAR PRESCOTT, — The *Life* has come to hand, and I have read it with great pleasure and perfect satisfaction on all accounts. It is just the thing it should be, and you need not fear to put your name to it. As a literary criticism upon Brown's genius and writings, it is beautiful, spirited, and graphic. There is nothing wanting but more biographical incidents and personal traits. These are not to be created, and if there were none to be found, why, there was an end of the matter. I cannot think that Brown's friends will not be pleased with your representation. If not, they will be more unreasonable than is to be expected. . . . All your dates are *14*93, etc. This shows that your mind was running on the age of Ferdinand and Isabella. Go on and prosper, and believe me, with kind remembrances and regards to your family,

As ever your sincere friend,

JARED SPARKS.

The memoir of Pickering was undertaken at the request of the Massachusetts Historical

Society, in whose collections (Third Series, Vol. X) it is to be found. It was a brief sketch of a friend who deserved commemoration for scholarly attainments and a quietly useful life. "It will not be long," wrote Prescott of this undertaking, "but, long or short, it will be a labor of love; for there is no man whom I honored more. . . . He was a true and kind friend to me; and, from the first moment of my entering on my historic career down to the close of his life, he watched over my literary attempts with the deepest interest. It will be a sad pleasure for me to pay an honest tribute to the good man's worth."

CHAPTER VII

THE QUEST OF A THEME

PRESCOTT'S bent towards historical writing declared itself strongly very soon after his loss of sight compelled him to abandon the law. One letter of his notes a tendency to historical studies perceptible in 1819. "A man," he wrote, "must find something to do," and to the writing of history he turned as by a deep and sure instinct. In a letter to Dr. Rufus Ellis, dated June 1, 1857, he said: "I had early conceived a strong passion for historical writing, to which, perhaps, the reading of Gibbon's 'Autobiography' contributed not a little. I proposed to make myself an historian in the best sense of the term." It was long, however, before he found the subject truly adapted to his ambition and his powers. His search for it is minutely recorded in his journal, during all his years of preparatory study.

An early entry took a broad survey of possible

"SUBJECTS FOR COMPOSITION."

"I. Autobiography, à la Alfieri [this was later struck through with his pen].

"II. Parallel between the Greek Demigods and Heroes of Chivalry.

"III. Comparison between the literatures of different nations.

"IV. Defense of any authors or species of composition in the *English tongue* against any *foreign* critics who may have impugned them."

[A dozen others of the kind ending with]

"XVI. Cui Bono?"

Soon his scope was narrowed, at the same time that the intensity of his researches was heightened. All that is necessary is to trace the trail as he has blazed it. About 1822 he wrote: —

"It is not rash, in the dearth of a well-written American history, to entertain the hope of throwing light upon this matter — especially with the rich materials which are now buried in pedantic lumber and foreign

languages in the Ebeling collection. But it requires time, and a long time, before the mind can be prepared for this department of writing."

There speaks Prescott's passion for thoroughly documenting himself. It never left him. And he took time.

October 16, 1825. "I have been so hesitating and reflecting upon what I shall do that I have, in fact, done nothing. I have looked into one or two pamphlets: into Schlegel's 'Histoire du XVIII Siècle.'"

October 30, 1825. "I have passed the last fortnight in examination of a suitable subject for historical composition, looking over catalogues, references, etc. It is well to determine with caution and accurate inspection."

Soon he began to hear Spain calling. By Christmas of the same year he was writing: —

"I have been hesitating between two topics for historical investigation — Spanish history from the invasion of the Arabs to the consolidation of the monarchy under Charles V, or a history of the revolution of ancient Rome,

which converted the republic into an empire. A third subject which invites me is a biographical sketch of eminent geniuses, with criticisms on their productions and on the character of their age. I shall probably select the first, as less difficult of execution than the second, and as more novel and entertaining than the last."

But the full spell of the Peninsula was not yet upon him. He wavered and deliberated afresh. This he did not mind. "I care not how long a time I take for it, provided I am diligent all that time." Again he canvassed the Roman theme. But on January 1, 1826, he wrote: —

"The great and learned Niebuhr has been employed these dozen years upon it. . . . Shall I beat the bushes after this? I have not quite decided, but I think not."

January 8, 1826. "I have decided to abandon the Roman subject."

Under the same date he recorded: —

"A work on the revolutions of Italian literature has invited my consideration this week. . . . It would not be new after the

production of Sismondi and the abundant notices in modern Reviews. Literary history is not so amusing as civil. Cannot I contrive to embrace the *gist* of the Spanish subject without involving myself in the unwieldy, barbarous records of a thousand years? What new and interesting topics may be admitted — not forced — into the reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella? . . . A Biography will make me responsible for a limited space only; will require much less reading (a great consideration with me); will offer the deeper interest which always attaches to minute developments of character, and a continuous, closely connected narrative. . . . The age of Ferdinand is most important as containing the germs of the modern system of European politics. . . . It is in every respect an interesting and momentous period of history; the materials ample, authentic, — I will chew upon this matter, and decide this week."

More than twenty years later, a penciled note on the foregoing passage ran, "This was the first germ of my conception of Ferdinand and Isabella." He was now hot on the scent.

Yet he made further faults. On January 15, 1826, he was "still doubting." He thought the Italian subject had "some advantages over the Spanish." He had the matter better in hand. He had fleshed his pen upon it already. His "capacity for doing justice to the other subject" he questioned. Still "the Spanish subject will be more new than the Italian;" "more interesting to the majority of readers, more useful to me by opening another and more practical department of study." He would need a "preliminary year" of investigation to make sure of his ground, but "on the whole, the inconvenience of that was overbalanced by the advantages of the Spanish topic."

Consequently, on January 19, 1826, Prescott wrote, "I subscribe to the 'History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella.'" Over against this entry he set, in 1847, the note, "A fortunate choice."

But it had many times to be renewed and confirmed, after repeated vacillation. Almost at the beginning of plans for amassing material and laying out his campaign, he was smitten with an access of inflammation in his eye,

and for four months had to pass all his time in a dark room. But his resolution was not shaken. He had himself read to from four to six hours a day by his secretary. "Traveling with this lame gait, I may yet hope in five or six years to reach the goal." But a little later hesitation reappears. On October 1, he wrote: —

"As it may probably be some years before I shall be able to use my own eyes in study, or even find a suitable person to read foreign languages to me, I have determined to postpone my Spanish subject, and to occupy myself with an 'Historical Survey of English Literature.' The subject has never been discussed as a whole, and therefore would be somewhat new, and, if well conducted, popular. But the great argument with me is, that, while it is a subject with which my previous studies have made me tolerably acquainted and have furnished me with abundance of analogies in foreign literatures, it is one which I may investigate nearly as well with my ears as with my eyes, and it will not be difficult to find good readers in the English, though

extremely difficult in any foreign language. *Faustum sit.*"

It required, however, only five weeks of reconnoitring the new fortress to convince him that the old one was his true point of attack. The record for November 5, 1826, is, "I have again, and I trust finally, determined to prosecute my former subject, the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella."

But the last doubt was not yet vanquished. As late as June 7, 1828, I find this record: —

"Renewed studies in Italian literature make me hesitate whether I should not prefer it as a matter of history to the Spanish subject which I had already chosen."

In two weeks the pendulum had swung back again: —

June 22. "I confirm my previous decision. . . . Shame on my doubtings, delays, and idleness!"

At last, —

July 3, 1828. "Finally, for the hundredth time, after a full and accurate reflection on the whole matter, I confirm my preference and choice of the Spanish subject."

After that date, no trace of relaxed purpose is to be found. To use one of Prescott's favorite quotations,

"Rapido ma rapido con leggi,"

he thereafter pressed on with the ten years of labor which went to the making of "Ferdinand and Isabella."

At this point may be most conveniently mentioned several literary projects which Prescott, in later years, was urged to take up, but all of which he declined.

Richard Ford, writing to Sumner, July 1, 1839, after telling him that he might "well be proud of your countryman" for his "Ferdinand and Isabella," — "this accession to English literature," — added: —

"I have ventured to suggest to him a new subject, an inquiry into the condition of the middle classes and people of Spain from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. He is, I conceive, admirably calculated to undertake this interesting theme; I know no modern author of greater perseverance, research, and accuracy, nor one possessing his talent of placing facts agreeably and truly before his reader."

On June 20, 1844, Benjamin F. French, of New Orleans, addressed a letter to Prescott, urging him to write the history of Louisiana. The attraction of the subject, and its relation to Prescott's own field, were duly set forth, together with an offer to put the writer's collection of material — including some rare works — at the historian's disposal.

Professor Moses Stuart of Andover sent Prescott a complimentary, yet discriminating, letter, praising his history as having "all the ease and grace and pleasant flow of Hume without his *shallowness ;* and all the depth and accuracy and thoroughness of Gibbon without his periodical swell and buskined gait," and earnestly advising him to take up some part of the history of his own country, or even of Massachusetts alone, for his next work.

Prescott's most tempting offer of the sort came to him in 1848. It was a proposal that he should write the history of the second Conquest of Mexico, — that by General Scott in 1847. In his journal for July 25, 1848, he noted the receipt of a letter from Charles King of New York making the suggestion on behalf

of General Scott, "offering me all his own papers, etc." But he declined. "The theme would be taking; but I had rather not meddle with heroes who have not been underground two centuries at least." As he later wrote to Ticknor, "I belong to the sixteenth century, and am quite out of place when I sleep elsewhere." With rare fidelity to his resolution once made, or possibly with a more accurate measure of his own powers than his correspondents had, he refused to be drawn aside. Invitations to deliver the Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard, or to read a paper before the National Institute at Washington, were declined. In self-imposed limitation the master displayed himself.

CHAPTER VIII

"FERDINAND AND ISABELLA"

THE task in hours of insight willed was fulfilled in years of unhasting, unresting toil. "Completed the corrections and arrangement," was the record in the diary of October 26, 1836. "Thus ends the labor of ten years, for I have been occupied with it . . . since the summer of 1826." But publishing was still deferred. "Ferdinand and Isabella" appeared at Christmas, 1837, with the year 1838 on the title-page. Indeed, Prescott was almost indifferent to publishing at all. He seems to have been stung to it by a remark of his father's. "The man," said Judge Prescott, "who writes a book which he is afraid to publish is a coward." That was a challenge to fighting blood. Thereafter let the presses beware. The historian had before set down for his own eye another motive for publication. "It is a satisfactory evidence to my mind," was the entry

of June 26, 1836, "of my moderate anticipations . . . that I feel not only no desire but a reluctance to publish, and should probably keep it by me for emendations and additions at my leisure, were it not for the belief that the ground would be more or less occupied in the meantime by abler writers. I hear already of Southey's preparation for a history of the Spanish Arabs, and it warns me not to defer my own publication."

Further citations from his reflections of the same date show how he fared through his long work, and how he profited by it.

"Pursuing the work in this quiet, leisurely way, without over-exertion or fatigue, or any sense of obligation to complete it in a given time, I have found it a continual source of pleasure. It has furnished food for my meditations, has given a direction and object to my scattered reading, and supplied me with regular occupation for hours that would otherwise have filled me with *ennui*. I have found infinite variety in the study, moreover, which might at first sight seem monotonous. No historical labors, rightly conducted, can be monotonous,

since they afford all the variety of pursuing a chain of facts to unforeseen consequences, of comparing doubtful and contradictory testimony, of picturesque delineations of incident, and of analysis and dramatic exhibition of character. The plain narrative may be sometimes relieved by general views or critical discussions, and the story and the actors, as they grow under the hands, acquire constantly additional interest. It may seem dreary work to plod through barbarous old manuscript chronicles of monks and pedants, but this takes up but a small portion of the time, and even here, read aloud to, as I have been, required such close attention as always made the time pass glibly. In short, although I have sometimes been obliged to whip myself up to the work, I have never fairly got into it without deriving pleasure from it, and I have most generally gone to it with pleasure, and left it with regret.

"What do I expect from it, now it is done? And may it not be all in vain and labor lost, after all? My expectations are not such, if I know myself, as to expose me to any serious disappointment. I do not flatter myself with

the idea that I have achieved anything very profound, or, on the other hand, that will be very popular. I know myself too well to suppose the former for a moment. I know the public too well, and the subject I have chosen, to expect the latter. But I have made a book illustrating an unexplored and important period, from authentic materials, obtained with much difficulty, and probably in the possession of no one library, public or private, in Europe. As a plain, veracious record of facts, the work, therefore, till some one else shall be found to make a better one, will fill up a gap in literature which, I should hope, would give it a permanent value, — a value founded on its utility, though bringing no great fame or gain to its author.

"Come to the worst, and suppose the thing a dead failure, and the book born only to be damned. Still it will not be all in vain, since it has encouraged me in forming systematic habits of intellectual occupation, and proved to me that my greatest happiness is to be the result of such. It is no little matter to be possessed of this conviction from experience."

It had been no holiday task. At its end, Prescott breathed like a spent swimmer reaching shore: —

"The discouragements under which I have labored have nearly determined me, more than once, to abandon the enterprise. . . . I began with teaching a reader to pronounce the Spanish so that I could comprehend him, and in this way went through several quartos, of which my reader himself understood no more than he did of the Chaldaic. . . . I have been about seven years and a half. . . . Had I possessed the industrious habits of a Southey or Sparks . . . I could have accomplished the work in much less time. But I was neither driven by necessity nor ambition to extra exertions, writing, as the old Fortiguerra says, —

'Per fuggir ozio, é non per cercar gloria.'"

The three stout volumes were published by the American Stationer's Company of Boston. The contract was practically at author's risk. A simultaneous London edition was desired by Prescott. But for a time his efforts to secure an English publisher were in vain. In that

respect, the fate of "Ferdinand and Isabella" threatened to become another example for the encouragement of the rejected. Murray peremptorily declined the work. Longman took time to look at it, but likewise refused in the end. Prescott was mortified and despairing. But his indefatigable friend, Colonel Aspinwall, persisted, and finally made an arrangement with Bentley. The history was to be elegantly printed, "with engravings, vignettes, etc.," and profits were to be divided. Prescott's chagrin changed to joy, and he wrote to Ticknor: —

"My object is now attained. I shall bring out the book in the form I desired, and under the most respectable auspices on both sides of the water, and in a way which must interest the publisher so deeply as to secure his exertions to circulate the work. My bark will be fairly launched, and if it should be doomed to encounter a spiteful puff or two of criticism, I trust it may weather it."

While on the material side of "Ferdinand and Isabella," it will be of both personal and historical interest to give Prescott's own account of the technical and pecuniary aspects of

his publishing venture. The minute analysis which he made of the whole affair reveals a practical talent which few would suspect in him. Evidently, if he had not been a famous historian, he could have been a successful business man. Here is the proof: —

"REMARKS ON THE PRINTING AND PUBLICATION OF 'FERDINAND AND ISABELLA.'"

"I will now [April 30, 1838] give an account of my arrangements for the publication of my history. In the first place I had the manuscript printed here by Dickinson, four copies only, for myself.

First part 831 pages	*Cost*	$187.84
Second " 807 " & 16 pp. contents	"	228.01
Notes of last chapter & reprint P. I. Chap. 1		40.25
		$456.10

An expense I shall never incur again.

. . . . . .

The cost of the whole stands thus:

Paid to Folsom, Wells and Thurston for plates, extra corrections included	$2143.90
" Andrews for one engraving . .	400.
" Stone " two "	160.
" Sibley " making index . . .	100.
	$2803.90

If to these I add:

Paid Flagg for portrait of Isabella for Andrews	40.
" Dickinson for first printed copy .	456.
Finally for cost Spanish books and MS.	1200.
	$4499.90

"Of this, $1000 for Spanish works was defrayed by my father, so that I was out of pocket, by the expenses of publication $3500.

"*Remarks.* I never regarded the cost of the affair, for I should not have selected such a topic with the idea of making money. But, as I have gained some experience . . . I shall note a few hints for my future government." There follow pages of minute analysis, worthy a book publisher. "One cost I shall never count — i. e., reasonably speaking — the cost of original and authentic materials." "Such sort of works as I shall be likely hereafter to turn out — not works of great and various research." Penciled margin: "Perhaps I may. In which case I have cramped too close."

"But, after all, although I note down these estimates that, in my future calculations and bargains I may have something to guide me

with the slippery 'trade,' yet I trust I shall never make the profit the main object; and never put my name to a work which I have not made as good as I can make it, *coûte que coûte.*

"Well, now for the result in America and England thus far. My work appeared here on the 25th of December, 1837. Its birth had been prepared for by the favorable opinions, *en avance*, of the few friends who in its progress through the press had seen it. It was corrected previously as to style, etc., by my friend Gardiner, who bestowed some weeks, and I may say months, on its careful revision, and who suggested many important alterations in the form. Simonds had previously suggested throwing the introductory 'Section 2' on Aragon into its present place, it first having occupied the place after Chapter III. The work was indefatigably corrected, and the references most elaborately and systematically prepared by Folsom. . . .

"From the time of its appearance to the present date, it has been the subject of notices, more or less elaborate, in the principal re-

views and periodicals of the country, and in the mass of criticism I have not met with one unkind, or sarcastic, or censorious sentence; and my critics have been of all sorts, from stiff conservatives to leveling loco-focos. Much of all this success is to be attributed to the influence and exertions of personal friends, much to the beautiful dress and mechanical execution of the book, — and much to the novelty, in our country, of a work of research in various foreign languages. The topics, too, though not connected with the times, have novelty and importance in them. Whatever is the cause, the book has found a degree of favor not dreamed of by me certainly, nor by its warmest friends. It will, I have reason to hope, secure me an honest fame, and — what never entered into my imagination in writing it — put, in the long run, some money in my pocket.

"In Europe things wear also a very auspicious aspect so far. The weekly periodicals — the lesser lights of criticism — contain the most ample commendations on the book; several of the articles being written with spirit

and beauty. How extensively the *trade* winds may have helped me along, I cannot say. But so far the course has been smooth and rapid. Bentley speaks to my friends in extravagant terms of the book, and states that nearly half the edition, which was of seven hundred and fifty copies, had been sold by the end of March. In France, thanks to my friend Ticknor, it has been put into the hands of the principal *savans* in the Castilian. Copies have also been sent to some eminent scholars in Germany. Thus far, therefore, we run before the wind, and I may hope the book has got such headway in the good opinion of the public that should an ugly squall strike it from one of the John Bull reviews of larger growth, it may be able to weather it."

"Well, for several days the binder was unable to do his work fast enough, and the volumes were taken off as fast as they were delivered to the good-natured public. In short, three fifths of the edition of 500 copies were sold in Boston before a copy could be sent to New York. The whole edition was exhausted in five weeks. Since that another impression

of 200 has been so rapidly disposed of that the market has been left bare, and has continued bare till the last week, for now more than a month, to the serious detriment of my pocket. A new edition has appeared this week. . . . The book . . . will now be distributed more extensively."

May 23, 1838. "Before leaving Boston I concluded a bargain with Little and Brown — I agreed to sell them 1700 copies of the History at $1.75 a copy. They are to have five years and a half to dispose of them; there being about 400 copies remaining on hand, at the time of making the contract, of those bought of the Stationer's Company. By this bargain I receive $3000, in addition to the $1000 before received, within six years from the publication."

It is no part of the writer's plan to undertake epitomes or appreciations of Prescott's books. That would be to fall into the one literary fault which a modern reader might find in "Ferdinand and Isabella" — prolixity. Its style partook of the leisurely spirit of the author's day. Prescott was a "gentleman of

letters," — as Theodore Parker called him, "a well-bred gentleman of letters," — and rapidity of movement was not then thought to go well with the grand manner. Seldom does one encounter an absolutely stilted passage in "Ferdinand and Isabella," but elegance of diction frequently becomes oppressive; and elaborate comparisons — such as that of Isabella with Queen Elizabeth — are pushed with a dire thoroughness upon which no writer would to-day venture. Yet the narrative bears re-reading wonderfully well, of so sustained an interest is it, so high-bred is the spirit which animates it, so sound and wide the scholarship. Theodore Parker, with his habit of brandishing "the whole tree of knowledge torn up by the roots," had a searching review of "Ferdinand and Isabella" in the "Massachusetts Quarterly" (II, p. 215), yet he did not impugn Prescott's learning. A later critic, Mr. Justin Winsor, made the somewhat ill-natured remark that Prescott thought of "composing history to be read as a pastime, rather than as of a study of completed truth." But the only specifications made are not happy. Look, said Mr.

Winsor, at Prescott's absurd contention that it is difficult to find "a single blemish" in the moral character of Columbus. This is harshly characterized as "flagrant disregard of the truth." Yet, as a matter of fact, no one has more clearly pointed out Columbus's "blemishes" — he uses the very word — than Prescott. He was so explicit about them that he felt compelled to put in the disclaimer, "I trust these remarks will not be construed into an insensibility to the merits and exalted services of Columbus" (II, p. 481). And as for Mr. Winsor's charge that Prescott was ready to "disguise the truth" in the interest of "hero-worship," what better refutation could there be than the historian's frankness concerning his real hero, Gonsalvo de Cordoba? It was in summing up the character of that extraordinary man that Prescott wrote: "History has no warrant to tamper with right and wrong, or to brighten the character of its favorites by diminishing one shade of the abhorrence which attaches to their vices." Prescott's love of truth was a part of his thoroughness. On his death it was said of him by one

most competent to speak, Jared Sparks, "I know of no historian, in any age or language, whose researches into the materials with which he was to work have been so extensive, thorough, and profound as those of Mr. Prescott." This it was that won for "Ferdinand and Isabella" the instant recognition of scholars the world over. Nor can that be taken as the fond exaggeration of an outgrown erudition. Thirty-six years later, the most scholarly review of America, calling up Prescott for readjudication, apropos of a new edition of his works, said that "notwithstanding the great advance of historical science, his works well maintain their high rank and reputation." Their author "knew all that was to be known upon the subject which he selected to write upon. . . . His writings . . . may well count upon a permanent rank in historical literature. . . . He is no Thucydides, or Gibbon, or Mommsen, or Ranke; but, giving all credit to the historians who have done honor to our literature since his day, it is not too much to say that he still stands at the head." ("The Nation," XVIII, pp. 252, 253.)

CHAPTER IX

AWAKING FAMOUS

"LOVE of the author gave the first impetus. The extraordinary merits of the work did all the rest." So wrote Prescott's friend and confidant, Gardiner, in accounting for the brilliant bookselling success won by "Ferdinand and Isabella." No work of serious scholarship had ever been in such demand in America. No American historian had before attained such acclaim from the judicious in Europe. As Gardiner said, the fame of the author began in Boston, where he had been chiefly known as a social favorite. His personal popularity was unbounded, though his literary labors had been known to but a few of his intimate friends. Ticknor believed that not more than two persons outside the Prescott family were aware that he was writing "Ferdinand and Isabella" until it was nearly completed. The journal early betrayed the secre-

tive habit. "Nor shall any one else if I can help it, know that I am writing." Hence it could happen that even a near relative, whom he was in the habit of meeting weekly, once urged him to undertake some serious pursuit, as a means both of happiness and social repute! At the moment he had spent eight years on his first great work. One is reminded of the nurse who thought Darwin's health would be better if he only had something to occupy his mind. All the greater, however, the stir in Prescott's circle when the book finally came out. Its appearance was a society "event." There was a rush to secure early copies. "A convivial friend," writes Gardiner, "who was far from being a man of letters, — indeed, a person who rarely read a book, — got up early in the morning and went to wait for the opening of the publisher's shop, so as to secure the first copy." The work became the fashionable Christmas present of the season. Such a thing it was, as Prescott wrote, to have the advantage of the "exertions of those whom I have thought and now find to be friends."

By all this sudden blaze of popularity and even fame the author's head was not turned. Prescott was, in fact, always singularly well poised in the matter of praise. He valued it; he was pleased by it; but he never allowed it to make him forget his own standards. His letter to his friend Ticknor, ten days after "Ferdinand and Isabella" was published, shows how he took success, as he would undoubtedly have taken failure, with a quiet mind: —

"Their Catholic Highnesses have just been ushered into the world in three royal octavos. The bantling appeared on a Christmas morning, and certainly has not fallen still-born, but is alive and kicking merrily. How long its life may last is another question. Within the first ten days half the first edition of five hundred copies (for the publishers were afraid to risk a larger one for our market) has been disposed of, and they are now making preparations for a second edition, having bought of me twelve hundred and fifty copies. The sale, indeed, seems quite ridiculous, and I fancy many a poor soul thinks so by this time. . . .

In the mean time the small journals have opened quite a cry in my favor, and while one of yesterday claims me as a Bostonian, a Salem paper asserts that distinguished honor for the witch-town. So you see I am experiencing the fate of the Great Obscure, even in my own lifetime. And a clergyman told me yesterday, he intended to make my case — the obstacles I have encountered and overcome — the subject of a sermon. I told him it would help to sell the book at all events.

"'Poor fellow!' — I hear you exclaim by this time, — 'his wits are actually turned by this flurry in his native village, — the Yankee Athens!' Not a whit, I assure you. Am I not writing to two dear friends, to whom I can talk as freely and foolishly as to one of my own household, and who, I am sure, will not misunderstand me? The effect of all this — which a boy at Dr. Gardiner's school, I remember, called *fungum popularitatem* — has been rather to depress me, and S—— was saying yesterday, that she had never known me so out of spirits as since the book has come out. The truth is, I appreciate, more than my

critics can do, the difficulty of doing justice to my subject, and the immeasurable distance between me and the models with which they have been pleased to compare me. . . . A favorable notice in a Parisian journal of respectability would be worth a good deal. But, after all, my market and my reputation rest principally with England, and if your influence can secure me, not a friendly, but a fair notice there, in any of the three or four leading journals, it would be the best thing you ever did for me, — and that is no small thing to say. But I am asking what you will do without asking, if any foreigner could hope to have such influence. I know that the *fiat* of criticism now-a-days depends quite as much on the temper and character of the reviewer as the reviewed, and, in a work filled with facts dug out of barbarous and obsolete idioms, it will be easy to pick flaws and serve them up as a sample of the whole. But I will spare you further twaddle about their Catholic Highnesses."

An entry in the journal of December 25, 1838, — one year after the publication of

"Ferdinand and Isabella," — reveals the historian's sanity as well as could pages: —

"Dr. Channing (the Dr. that *preaches*, not he that practises) said last evening 'It ["Ferdinand and Isabella"] has been received by acclamation.' Yet I am not such an ass as not to know that fires which blaze up the quickest are soonest out. But if I be an ass of an historian, the public are greater asses to have endorsed me — that 's some comfort."

European recognition came swift and full. This was naturally more gratifying to Prescott than the acclamation of personal friends, or acknowledgments possibly dictated by patriotic prejudice. As the historian privately noted at a later date: "These tributes from another quarter of the world, without the bias of national partiality, come like the voice of posterity, not to be bribed or bought." Many details are given by Ticknor of the immediate admission of Prescott to the company of European scholars. The English reviews gave their prompt applause. Hallam, Milman, Ford were enthusiastic. Nor were continental savants backward in offering their suffrages. By

printed review and private letters — the latter leading in some cases to friendly correspondence long sustained — they hailed Prescott as an equal in learning. The Comte de Circourt, Sismondi, Tocqueville, Humboldt (later), Thierry, pressed forward with their compliments. Learned societies showered their membership upon him. The total of these, American and foreign, is, as I reckon from the somewhat confused data accessible, thirty-three. In his private note on two of them, — the Royal Society of Literature, London, and the English Society of Antiquaries, Prescott wrote: "The first I share with Bancroft — the last with no other Yankee."

To round out this account of Prescott's European fame, may be conveniently grouped here letters which came in the course of several years after "Ferdinand and Isabella." They are additional to those printed by Ticknor. Let this from Hallam lead off: —

WIMPOLE STREET, LONDON,
June 1, 1838.

DEAR SIR, — I avail myself of the return of our acquaintance, Mr. Ticknor, to America,

a circumstance which in itself I regret, to thank you for the very obliging present I received through his hands of your valuable history of "Ferdinand and Isabella." It does much honour to your research, taste, and judgment, and reflects credit on the literature of your native country. The period of history is so important and interesting that I expect your work to acquire by degrees a classical reputation. It is well spoken of by those who have read it here, but a book published in a foreign country, though there may be an English edition of it, does not make its way very rapidly.

I am glad to hear from Mr. Ticknor that your eyesight is so much restored as to give us hope of fresh labors in the vineyard of letters.

Believe me, Dear Sir,

Your much obliged and faithful servant,

HENRY HALLAM.

"This," noted Prescott, "is gratifying enough from one at the head of the craft, and a writer whom Sir J. Mackintosh notices as

singularly parsimonious of his commendation. Gibbon says in his Memoirs, 'A letter from Mr. Hume overpaid the labors of ten years.' Without such extravagance, I may truly say, no letter that I ever received in reference to my writings has given me more satisfaction. It is one of the rewards of the scholar, and no mean one."

Prescott's intimacy with Sumner will be dwelt on in another connection. When abroad in 1839, the latter acted as a kind of purveyor of praise to his friend Prescott, by means of letters to George S. Hillard.

For example: —

December 25, 1838.

I believe I mentioned to you that Mr. Elphinstone praised Prescott's work extravagantly. He is called the cleverest man in England, and has twice refused the Governor-Generalship of India. He is a delightful person.

January 6, 1839.

You will read the article on Prescott in the "Edinburgh." It is written by somebody who

understands the subject, and who praises with great discrimination. Some of my friends suppose it was done by John Allen, the friend of Lord Holland. Mr. Hallam, however, thought it was not by him but by a Spaniard who is in England. I shall undoubtedly be able to let you know by my next letter. Mr. Ford, the writer of the Spanish articles in the "Quarterly," has undertaken to review Prescott's book for that journal. Whether his article will be ready for the next number I cannot tell. Prescott ought to be happy in his honorable fame. I do not go anywhere that I do not hear him spoken of. His publisher, Bentley, is about to publish a second edition in two volumes, and he told me that he regarded the work as the most important he had ever published, and as one which would carry his humble name to posterity. Think of Bentley astride of the shoulders of Prescott on the journey to posterity! Milman told me that he thought it the greatest work that had yet proceeded from America. Mr. Wishaw, who is now blind and who was the bosom friend of Sir Samuel Romilly, has had it read to him,

and says that Lord Holland calls it the most important historical work since Gibbon. I have heard Hallam speak of it repeatedly, and Harness and Rogers and a great many others I might mention if I had more time and I thought you had more patience.

In a letter of Sumner's to Dr. Palfrey in Cambridge, we read: —

"Prescott has by one step taken his place at the head of American literature. He has had the best kind of success. His work has been read by all the best educated people in England. I have seen it in the halls of the nobility and on the tables and shelves of literary men. His name is already known as Robertson's and Hallam's. I think no historical work has ever so soon succeeded in England before."

Prescott comments on the above in his journal: —

"With the most liberal allowance for the obvious — though, of course, unintentional — over-statement, there remains enough to show that the work has been received with a degree

of favor by the British public which I certainly neither did nor could have had any right to anticipate."

Miss Edgeworth early conceived a great admiration for Prescott. She wrote to Mrs. Ticknor: —

August 23, 1844.

. . . Prescott's "History of Mexico" — I am charmed with it; so much so that after having read it to myself when I was recovering from illness, I begged to hear it read over again as soon as I had finished it, that I might reënjoy the pleasure and the super-added of the effect on all my family.

Under date of September 20, 1844, Mr. W. B. Sprague sends to Prescott an extract from a letter he had just received from Maria Edgeworth: —

"I have said nothing of the books we have been reading — I should have told you that we have been reading Prescott's 'Conquest of Mexico,' — *the most interesting book I have seen this century.*"

A later letter came direct: —

Edgeworths Town, August 25, 1845.

With feelings of the greatest respect and admiration for Mr. Prescott's talents and character I take the liberty of writing to him though I am personally a stranger.

I inclose to him a catalogue and account of a series of Spanish pictures, the subjects taken from the Mexican Conquest. The pictures are now in the possession of Mr. Cholmley, a Yorkshire gentleman, who is proud of them as curiosities, but knows nothing about them, and having no literary taste, has made no inquiry and does not care to make any: but would have no objection, his friends think, to having them shown, or to have copies or engravings taken from them. The account inclosed was partly quoted from Robertson, partly written by a lady who, at the request of a friend of ours, made inquiries about these pictures for me. Though you must [be] better acquainted than she or we are with all Robertson says, yet I send the extracts she has made from him, as they will bring all the subject together before your eye. The extracts from Robertson are marked with quotation — the

lady's own notes are not marked as quotations.

I inclose (to save myself the time of copying, as I am much hurried at this moment) some scraps of notes which contain all the little information we have been able to collect about these pictures and the manner in which they came into Mr. Cholmley's possession.

I have a recollection of your mentioning in your history of the "Conquest of Mexico" the capture of a ship carrying over pictures among other *valuables* of Europe — either to Spain or France — but I have looked for the passage in vain.

Dear Mr. Prescott, I am afraid that I am taking up your most valuable time with what may not be interesting or intelligible to you from the imperfect information I send. But you will, I am sure, from your amiable temper (with which I am, from our dear friends the Ticknors, perfectly acquainted) give me credit for my motive — and believe in my sincere wish to do anything in my power to oblige you or to give you the least pleasure in return for

the great quantity of delightful pleasure and information you have given me.

Believe me, dear Mr. Prescott,

Your obliged and grateful,

MARIA EDGEWORTH.

After this *place aux dames*, and in order to end the chapter with masculine learning — Teuton at that — take this from Von Raumer: —

"You have, despite the trouble with your eyes, finished three masterpieces. . . .

"Baron Humboldt, whose mind remains ever fresh and youthful, sends you his greetings, as do many other ladies and gentlemen unknown to you."

This was the same man of whom Prescott wrote in his journal, September 15, 1844: —

"Dragged to town two days since to see Von Raumer. Neither Von nor Don shall start me again."

CHAPTER X

THE MAN OF LETTERS

RICHARD FORD'S review of "Ferdinand and Isabella" in the "Quarterly" contained a little playful sarcasm at the expense of Prescott's style. This, wrote Sir William Stirling, in his article in "Fraser" entitled "In Memoriam," "Prescott confessed to us that he did not much like." He had not forgotten to scrutinize his own style, — witness the entry in his diary: —

February 13, 1830. "Mem. Two or three faults of style occur to me on looking over some former compositions — too many adjectives; too many couplets of substantives as well as of adjectives and perhaps of verbs; too set sentences too much in the same mould; too many precise emphatic pronouns, as these, those, which, etc., instead of the particles the, a, etc.; occasionally unnecessary expletives; moral or practical reflections introduced too

ceremoniously instead of incidentally; no other defects occur to me at present, and I cannot charge myself with what I most fear — timidity."

Again, in his journal, the historian showed how sweet may be the uses of criticism: —

August 4, 1839. "Have been led by the strictures in the 'Quarterly' to review the *style* of my 'History,' as I shall always make it a point to draw all the benefit I can from critiques on my writings. . . . I have devoted several days to a careful scrutiny of my defects, and to a comparison of my style with that of standard English writers of the present time. Master Ford complains, etc. . . . One more conclusion is — that I will not hereafter vex myself with anxious thoughts about my style when composing. It is formed."

Nothing could be more characteristic than the foregoing extract. Prescott's anxious desire to perfect his work and to profit by every honest criticism; his thoroughness of self-judgment by the highest standards, and, when all was done, the poised serenity of his spirit in putting away forever a care with which it

was vain to vex himself longer — these things are of the very essence of the man. His lofty ideals as a writer find frequent reflection in his private records: —

"On the whole, there is service, and knowledge and improvement gained by pondering deeply the masterpieces — few, very few — of literature [he had been reading Shakespeare] instead of diffusing one's self over the whole surface of second and third rate productions. Hereafter I will propose a few such to myself, and endeavor to become more and more intimate with them."

"Of one thing I am persuaded. No motives but those of an honest fame and of usefulness will ever be of much weight with me in stimulating my labors. I never shall be satisfied to do my work slovenly or superficially. It would be impossible for me to do the job-work of a literary hack. Fortunately, I am not driven to write for *bread;* and I never will write for money."

On the fly-leaf of Volume X of his "Literary Memoranda" stands this motto from Cicero — "Scribendi autem me non tam fructus, et

gloria, quam studium ipsum, exercitatioque delectat; — quod mihi nulla res eripiet."

No writer ever wrought more faithfully in that spirit.

Prescott gave himself secret warnings: —

April 1, 1841. "Never shrink from telling the truth. If I am retained by the Spaniards, I shall lose my reputation with every other people. I spoke fearlessly in 'Ferdinand and Isabella.' Do so now."

At the head of the first page of the eleventh volume of his journal, under date February 17, 1842, stands the following couplet: —

"For sluggard's brow the laurel never grows.
Renown is not the child of indolent repose."

Immediately after came this: —

February 17, 1842. "I consume too much time on notes and on *pettinesses* every way. Think more of general effect and impression. Don't quiddle nor twaddle."

Once more: —

July 28, 1849. "After all, regular composition of a great historic work is the best recipe for happiness — for me."

But Prescott had others to think of. In his

representative capacity he had a large correspondence with foreigners. "I can't write a short letter, though it were on my deathbed." This was his explanation of the entry of November 15, 1842: "I send eight long letters to Europe to-morrow." Turning to his Record of Correspondence, which he kept for years with methodical exactness, we may find to whom those eight letters were sent and what they were about: —

Mr. Edward Everett — Inclosing letters to Italy. Asking about publisher.

Don Neri Corsini — Thanking him. Asking leave for Mr. Green to ins.

Marquis Capponi — Thanking for present — Remarks on F. & I. trans.

Mr. G. W. Green — Suggesting to call on Corsini.

Mr. Tytler — Thanking for his history. His offer of MSS.

Mr. Gayangos — Philip II — In Paris to mem. Granville.

Mr. Dickens — Thanking him for his book. He to define terms for Mad^{e} C.

SEÑOR CORDERERA — Advising of remittance. Ordering Phil. of Ec. & Colum.

In his later life, Prescott hospitably entertained the literary stranger within our gates. Many noted foreigners turned their steps to his home on Beacon Street. It was there that J. G. Kohl, the German geographer, saw him. This was the impression recorded: "I met but few Americans so distinguished by elegance and politeness; and when I first met him, and before knowing his name, I took him for a diplomatist. He had not the slightest trace of the dust of books and learning. . . . He was at that time past his 60th year and yet his delicate, nobly chiseled face possessed such a youthful charm that he could fascinate young ladies."

One young lady, a kinswoman, was perhaps the first to make Prescott pay that bitter-sweet penalty of literary fame — to become the involuntary confidant and adviser of aspiring brothers or sisters of the craft. The letter which he received from Captain Henry Prescott, of St. Johns, in 1840, was accompanied by

a volume of poems from the pen of the writer's daughter. That authoress later wrote him this note: —

My dear Sir, — I cannot resist giving myself the pleasure of thanking you, in my own person, for the gift of your valuable work, which will indeed, as long as I live, have an honored place in my library. As a woman, I am bound to be grateful to you for the justice you have done to the character of one of the noblest of my sex; and as a Prescott I am truly proud of the fame, which I trust you will long live to enjoy. . . .

Henrietta Prescott.

St. Johns, March 12, 1841.

But this was nothing to what was to come. On March 27, 1841, the following letter was addressed to him from Wakefield, England: —

Sir, — The perusal of your admirable "History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic," has suggested the composition of the enclosed little drama entitled "The Siege of Granada." As I have printed but a very limited number of copies, a new edition

is not improbable; would you allow me to dedicate my next, and, I trust, more corrected edition, to yourself?

I am, sir, with all respect,

Your M. O. S.,

Wm. Henry Leatham.

What answer Prescott gave the poet may be inferred from this fragment of a letter two years later: —

February 11, 1843.

. . . As you kindly expressed yourself pleased with my little poetical performance, I have inclosed for your acceptance a complete set of my poems.

Wm. H. Leatham.

But the historian was far from through with this insistent bard. Every history fatally inspired a poem. The "Conquest of Mexico" led Mr. Leatham to indite some verses on Montezuma. Of these he wrote, on October 10, 1844, proposing to print this poem, together with his drama, "The Siege of Granada," in a little book to be dedicated to Prescott, and asks, "Do you think it would

command any sale in America?" In his poem he says, describing the ancient "unholy rites," —

"And human gore was seen to pour like water in the sun."

The youth chosen for sacrifice had his fill of color, and enjoyment, and sweet-smelling flowers —

"Till that day year the bloody bier will snatch him from their bowers."

When Montezuma at last comes to die —

"He speaks no more but bows his head, his eyeballs cease to roll.
His race is run and with the sun has passed the monarch's soul.
Soon as the awe-struck Mexicans had heard their king was dead,
A distant wail rose on the gale, and through the city spread.
But short their grief; each warrior-chief by Cuitlahuac led,
In wrath arose to smite his foes, if not already fled —
Their sullen tramp has reached the camp where Cortez vainly strives.
The Spaniard from the wave-girt wall the gallant Aztec drives;

Till morning breaks o'er reedy lakes throughout the dismal night,
The swarthy sons of Mexico prolong the bloody fight,
And for his cursèd stratagem the General dearly paid,
For vainly did he wield his lance and keen Toledo blade!"

Another persistent English correspondent of Prescott's was Dr. S. A. Dunham. An exposure of this gentleman's ignorance in a footnote of "Ferdinand and Isabella" seemed to establish a lien upon Prescott's time and kindness. He promptly wrote to ask what were the chances of his obtaining a livelihood in the United States. Prescott apparently gave him some Greeleyesque advice. At any rate, Dr. Dunham quickly rejoined with a round dozen of questions, one of which was, "To what portion of the far West do you allude?" The farther west the better, one might think Prescott would have been tempted to reply to a man who seemed to think that one considerate word implied an undertaking to care for him and his family forever after. What Prescott did reply is of value not only as illustrating his own admirable temper, but as throwing

an instructive light upon the nature of the struggle for existence of the American man of letters at the time.

TO DR. DUNHAM

BOSTON, January 30, 1844.

MY DEAR SIR, — I am extremely concerned to learn that the cloud still hangs so darkly over your prospects, now that you are again on your native soil. I was in hopes that, once more among your friends, and in a country where men of letters are sufficiently numerous to make a distinct and important class, your just claims would be recognized. It is impossible for a foreigner, like myself, to judge of the expediency of the plans you suggest for the future maintenance of your family. And I am grieved to be obliged to say that I think it would be in vain to look for a contribution towards it here. There are so many projects that appeal so directly to those most liberally disposed in our community that their resources seem to be preoccupied.

With respect of contributions to the newspapers, I fear there will be as little chance of

success in that quarter. You might indeed furnish articles on literary matters to a respectable journal like our "North American." But the compensation is too inconsiderable to furnish an inducement; since it is only a dollar a printed page. I have known this journal to give two dollars a page to a popular writer who would contract for a certain amount of pages per annum. I know not whether this is ever done by the present editor. Should you send anything to me for that Journal I shall have much pleasure in handing it to the Editor and ascertaining whether he would be inclined to make an engagement with you for the future. Our newspapers do not press often into their service writers who have drunk deep of the good wells of learning, and a penny-a-line manufacturer of casualties will find more encouragement with most of them than a man of learning. I have suggested it to one of our most respectable editors but he has given me no encouragement.

W. H. PRESCOTT.

Miss L. I. Lincolne, "a perfect stranger"

to him, — and otherwise not too perfect to be a sly young autograph hunter, — wrote him from Norwich, March 25, 1856, a rather gushing letter saying how very much she had enjoyed the two volumes of "Philip II" and representing herself in a state of frantic impatience to hear the rest of the story — what was the fate of the Prince of Orange, etc., — and begging him to hurry up with the rest of the work. Prescott answered her letter kindly; for she writes again (May 15, 1856) thanking him effusively and saying that his letter is "carefully treasured," while not forgetting to ask some questions as bait for a second letter.

Even Prescott's patience broke down before one appeal that came to him. In August of 1858 Señor Don Pedro Felix Vicuña of Valparaiso sent him a long and flowery letter. After a glowing tribute to the country of Washington and Jefferson, he proceeded to request that Prescott would write a public letter, throwing his influence upon the right side, in order to calm the political tumults of Chili. Señor Vicuña adds that he has forwarded a

little "production of his own" which apparently he desired Prescott to aid him in publishing. This letter bore the unexampled indorsement, "No answer." A letter to and from George Bancroft may fitly close this chapter. Bancroft had reviewed "Ferdinand and Isabella" in the "Democratic Review," and Prescott wrote in acknowledgment: —

Saturday, P. M. (indorsed May 5, 1838).

DEAR BANCROFT, — I return the review with my hearty thanks. I think it is one of the most delightful tributes ever paid by friendship to authorship. And I think it is written in your very happiest manner. I do not believe, in estimating it so, I am misled by the subject, or the writer, for I have not been very easy to please on the score of puffs, of which I have had full measure, you know, from my good-natured friends. But the style of the piece is gorgeous, without being overloaded, and the tone of sentiment most original, without the least approach to extravagance or obscurity. Indeed, the originality of the thoughts and the topics touched on constitute

its great charm, and make the article even at this eleventh hour, when so much has been said on the subject, have all the freshness of novelty. In this, I confess, considering how long it had been kept on the shelf, I am most agreeably disappointed. As to the length, it is, taken in connection with the sort of critique, just the thing. It will terrify none from venturing on it, and I am sure a man must be without relish for the beautiful, who can lay it down without finishing.

Faithfully yours,

WM. H. PRESCOTT.

P. S. There is one thing which I had like to have forgotten, but which I shall not forgive. You have the effrontery to speak of my having passed the prime of life, some dozen years ago. Why, my youthful friend, do you know what the prime of life is? Molière shall tell you: —

"Hé bien! qu'est ce que cela, soixante ans? C'est le fleur de l'âge cela." Prime of life, indeed! People will think the author is turned of seventy. He was a more discreet critic that called me "young and *modest!*"

Five years later, when the "Conquest of Mexico" was published, Bancroft wrote to the author: —

MY DEAR PRESCOTT, — Thanks for your beautiful volumes, which I have read with admiration and delight. You handle your subject like one inspired with it. The fervor glows everywhere. After finishing the second volume, I took down Robertson: shall I confess with some anxiety? On comparing the thrilling scenes, I think your account as correctly expressed in point of style, more vivid, more dramatic, and with a better development of causes. Till I read, I had some uncertainty about popularity; I have no doubt now. Your volumes will be among the most widely read in the English language.

That you may see what the locofocos think, I mean the sound ones, not such Tylerites as we have in this city, I send you Bryant's Criticism, only adding I made up my mind last night and got Bryant's this morning.

Yours always,

G. BANCROFT.

December, 1843.

CHAPTER XI

THE "CONQUEST OF MEXICO"

PRESCOTT'S second historical work — at once his most praised and most belittled — was a natural sequence of his first. Indeed, in "Ferdinand and Isabella" itself there is a sort of unconscious premonition of what was to follow, — the reference, at the end of the second volume, to that "young adventurer who was destined, by the conquest of Mexico, to realize all the magnificent visions, which had been derided as only visions, in the lifetime of Columbus." Yet it was long before the historian found his subject.

"This ['Ferdinand and Isabella'] is probably," he set down in his diary, under date of March 10, 1833, "the only civil history I shall ever attempt." He did not mean to exclude literary history, to which his thoughts at first reverted after the completion and publication of "Their Catholic Majesties," as he was

fond of calling his book. It had been an old bent of his. When halfway through "Ferdinand and Isabella" he recorded: "But, after all, literary history is more consonant with my taste, my turn of mind, and all my previous studies. The sooner I complete my present work, the sooner I shall be enabled to enter upon it."

He now proposed to write a life of Molière, on whom he had, in 1828, done an article in the "North American Review." As usual, he set about drenching himself in material. He ordered every attainable authority and aid from Paris. But a wiser purpose slowly asserted itself, and we find in the journal of May 27, 1838: —

"Before they [materials for projected Molière] arrived, however, the favor shown to the 'History of Ferdinand and Isabella' encouraged me to go on with another subject which seemed to be a natural continuation of the last, which had the superior advantage of relating to my own quarter of the globe, and for which I now possessed eminent advantages for procuring original unpublished materials

from Spain. . . . I have since — the last week in April — forwarded letters to different *savans* in Madrid, with a letter of credit on the Barings for 300 pounds, . . . in order to procure such curious, original, and authentic documents as may throw light on the discovery and conquest of Mexico and Peru. . . . Should I succeed in my present collection, who knows what facilities I may find for making one relative to Philip II^ds^ reign? — a fruitful theme."

Prescott made it his first business to secure every printed work extant that bore on his subject, and as many copies of manuscripts as possible. "Your manuscripts," he noted, "is the only staple for the historic web — at least the only one to make the stuff which will stand the wear and tear of old Father Time."

Fortunately his purse did not lay an embargo on his scholar's instinct. He was able to purchase even such works as Lord Kingsborough's sumptuous volumes on Mexican Antiquities. "As I could not borrow, it was necessary to buy his Lordship's mammoth work — the hard necessity of a country with-

out libraries." Friends and scholars abroad aided him in his collections until at last even he was satisfied, and could write: —

"The doubt as to the acquisition of the materials essential to the success of my undertaking is dispelled; and these materials, safe from all the perils of land and water, are now on my own shelves."

A preliminary difficulty remained. He learned through Mr. Cogswell of the Astor Library that Irving had begun to write on the Conquest of Mexico. There followed as generous an act of literary abnegation as could be cited. Irving promptly and handsomely yielded the field to Prescott. The correspondence between the two, at that time not personally acquainted, is given by Ticknor and by Pierre Irving in the biography of his uncle. It is probable that Prescott did not fully realize what it cost Irving to abandon the project. The grace of the surrender hid its bitterness.

But the nephew has recorded the "fit of vexation" in which Irving destroyed what he had already written, and George Sumner wrote

to his brother Charles from Malaga, November 19, 1843 : —

"It is delightful to hear the tones of admiration in which Irving always speaks of Prescott, although the abandonment of the 'Conquest of Mexico' which he had commenced cost him a pang! His steam was just fairly up when he heard that Prescott was at work upon the same subject. For a week after he abandoned it he felt like a fish out of water and took to planting cabbages most desperately."

There is no reason to think, however, that Irving's self-sacrifice, while it heightened his reputation for magnanimous dealing, resulted in any real loss to American literature. Prescott had incomparably the ampler resources; he was a more relentless investigator than Irving; brooded longer over his subjects, until their artistic form of presentation became clear to him; and so, even if he lacked something of Irving's natural magic of style, was the fitter man to do the work. Irving himself freely acknowledged this when Prescott's volumes on the "Conquest" were put into his

hands. Prescott, on his part, paid Irving the finest compliments, in his preface and elsewhere. The entire incident was honorable to both writers. Prescott did not forget to be equally generous when it came time for him to throw open his Spanish preserves to Motley.

In the journal the withdrawal of Irving is thus recorded: —

"The only competitor who, I feared, might possibly have turned his eyes in the same direction was Irving — not from any intimation he had given of this — which would have prevented me from thinking of it at all — but from the circumstance of his having formerly hunted on this ground. A very polite and courteous message from him, through our common friend Cogswell, followed by a letter of the same tone, has put these doubts at rest, and left the field open to me. And now I shall go merrily forward in my historical labors."

Prescott himself placed the milestones along his Mexican road. They are as follows: —

May, 1838. "Began scattered reading on the subject, doubtful if I get my documents

from Spain. Very listless and *far-nient*-ish for a year. Over-visiting and not in spirits."

April, 1839. "Began to read in earnest, having received manuscripts from Madrid."

October 14, 1839. "Wrote first page of Introduction at Pepperell."

March 1, 1841. "Finished Introduction and Part I. of Appendix."

August, 1841–August, 1842. "Composed 562 pages of print, text and notes of the narrative."

August, 1842–August, 1843. "Composed 425 pages print, text and notes; revised Ticknor's corrections and his wife's, of all the work. Corrected, etc., proofs of nearly all the work. The last book required severe reading of MSS."

August 2, 1843. "Finished the work. So the Introduction, about half a vol., occupied about as long as the remaining two and a half vols. of dashing narrative."

Further scattered excerpts from Prescott's own notes on his work will reveal, better than could labored description, his conception of his task and his methods in its execution.

July 7, 1839. "The 'Conquest of Mexico' was the greatest miracle in an age of miracles. . . .

"In short, the true way of conceiving the subject is, not as a philosophical theme, but as an epic in prose. . . .

"It is without doubt the most poetic subject ever offered to the pen of the historian."

One notes in passing that Lowell agreed with Prescott. He at one time planned an epic on the Conquest of Mexico.

Again from the journal: —

July 21, 1839. "Not a bad week — but feel the want of solid materials to buckle to." . . .

August 4, 1839. "My two volumes will be completed by May 4, 1842, my forty-sixth birthday. There is nothing extravagant in this surely, and if I wrote from the *auri fames* it would be done to a certainty. As it is — *incertus sum.*" . . .

January 1, 1840. "If I ever get out of the moonshine period of the old Aztecs." . . .

February 9, 1840. "This last week received a diploma from the Royal Academy of Science

at Naples, and a letter accompanying it to Dr. Bachi from the President, Count Carmaldoli, in which he says 'my nomination was received with *unanime acclamazione*,' and that 'I have written a work which, in the parts relating to Italy is *assai superiore agli stessi Italiani*,' and that places '*Signor Prescott nel primo rango de più grandi Istorici*.' This will do for *pulcherrima Italia*." . . .

June 15, 1840. "It [note-making] is a twaddly business. Bancroft saves his time prodigiously by making none at all. I will do my duty by the Introduction, but when I have slipped on the Narrative, I will send the notes to the devil — at least all but strictly critical ones." . . .

January 3, 1841. "My journal is paved, like some other places, with good resolutions." . . .

January 10, 1841. "I have not been diligent enough. I chew on my subject more than enough. If I put my bones to it, I should do the work better as well as faster. I *will*. Or write against time and a forfeit as I did once to get a start in 'Ferdinand and Isabella.'" . . .

April 1, 1841. "Allowing two days' reading for one of writing . . . will complete the work in two years and a quarter — say in July, 1843, [later penciled mem. 'The last pages were written in July, 1843'] and why should I not? This is not faster than Gibbon wrote his last six vols. on an infinitely harder subject, nor nearly as fast as Irving wrote his 'Columbus.'" . . .

September 28, 1841. "Finished text of chap. I Book 3rd, . . . full of the picturesque — reads very like Miss Porter — rather boarding-schoolish finery. I am a fraud." . . .

June 27, 1842. "I will try [to do fixed task] though this memorandum book is paved with resolutions, as hell-floor is said to be — a *broken* pavement, too." . . .

August 2, 1843. "On the whole the last two years have been the most industrious of my life, I think — especially the last year, and as I have won the Capitol it entitles me to three months of literary loafing."

Midway in his "Conquest of Mexico," the historian was compelled to turn aside to make an abridgment of "Ferdinand and Isabella."

This was to head off a piratical edition then threatened. The job was most distasteful to Prescott, as Ticknor intimates, though he does not give the language which the journal used. The extract is full of that homely speech into which the Yankee blood in Prescott often impelled him to break in private, though most of it the elegant Ticknor passed by, in a stretch of charity for one who was not, like himself, always in full dress.

July 19, 1841. "Finished Abridg. Hist. of F. & I. Io triumphe! three weeks and a half since I first put pen to paper. About one tenth of the vol. written *de novo* — the rest docked, scissored, sweated, headed and tailed. I shied, like a skittish horse at a leap, and find 'tis a mudpuddle only. Dirty work, however, and I wish the publishers would let it sleep till some one starts up with a rival abridgment."

The abridgment was not, in fact, published, the pirate having sailed away.

As usual, Prescott turned bookseller after bookwriter, and painstakingly scrutinized his accounts. The right of publishing the "Conquest of Mexico" he sold to the Harpers from

plates provided by himself. The publishers were to have 5000 copies, for which they offered $7500 in cash — "an enormous price," notes Prescott, "which I should not have had the courage to ask of any publisher." The agreement was for a single year, in which Harper and Brothers were to take as many more copies on the same terms as they might order. "I hope they may not be disappointed, for their sakes as well as mine. But this is a different contract from that which ushered 'Ferdinand and Isabella' into the world." In the result, the 5000 copies were sold in four months. The English edition had also a great sale. Passing over mere business details, the following may be cited from Prescott's "Reflections on the Printing, etc., of my Histories," September 10, 1843.

"I have employed Folsom and paid him fifty dollars per vol. for correcting the printed proofs. He has done it faithfully, and though I have not taken more than one in five of his corrections, I think they are worth the money. If I had taken them all, or nearly all, it would have ruined the book."

A characterization of this famous and still familiar book of Prescott's could be called for only on the principle of the mediæval scholar who, Hallam tells us, took for his motto, "This I include lest anything be left unsaid." One word may be inserted, however, in reply to the natural question how the "Conquest of Mexico" has stood the wear and tear of subsequent historical investigation. At first there was a decided lurch adverse to Prescott. Wilson and his school resolved "the golden cupolas of Mexico," as Disraeli called them with characteristic grandiloquence, into Indian mud huts, and made of the Spanish chroniclers a set of impudent liars. But the due reaction came. Archæology has, of course, uncovered many things never guessed in Prescott's day in regard to "the moonshine period" of the Aztecs. Later scholars have sifted and checked Bernal Diaz — "that jewel of a chronicler" — and the other Spanish writers in a way not possible in Prescott's day. New material has come to light. Yet when every allowance of this sort has been made, the fact remains that the "Conquest of Mexico" holds its own wonderfully

well. Supercilious young novelists may sneer at it as "Prescott's romance that he passed off for history," but the competent know better. A fair and sufficient summary of the state of the case is given by H. H. Bancroft in his monumental "History of Mexico:" —

"For his 'Conquest of Mexico,' besides all printed material extant, Mr. Prescott drew upon a large mass of new information in manuscript, from several sources, notably from the valuable collection of Muñoz, brought together for an intended history of America; that of Vargas Ponce, obtained chiefly from Seville archives; that of Navarrete, president of the Royal Academy of History at Madrid; and the archives of Cortés' heirs, all of which shed new light on almost every section of the subject. His deep research, manifest throughout in copious footnotes, is especially displayed in the very appropriate introduction on Mexican civilization, which enables the reader to gain an intimate knowledge of the people whose subjugation he follows. Good judgment is also attested in the dissertation on the moot question of the origin

of this culture, wherein he prudently abstains from any decided conclusions. The fact of occasional inaccuracies cannot be severely criticised when we consider the infirmity under which the author labored. Since his time so great a mass of material has been brought to light that the aspect of history is much changed. This new material consists partly of native records, and it is due to his unacquaintance with these records that a great lack is implied in his pages. The fact that Prescott relied too much on Spanish material may account for the marked bias in favor of the conquerors in many instances where strict impartiality might be expected, and for the condemnatory and reflective assertions which at times appear in direct contradiction to previous lines of thought. At times, as if aware of this tendency, he assumes a calmness that ill fits the theme, giving it the very bias he seeks to avoid. Yet with all this it is safe to say that few histories have been written in which the qualities of philosopher and artist are so happily blended."

The immediate enthusiasm with which the

"Conquest of Mexico" was received has been implied. The book won a much wider audience than "Ferdinand and Isabella." From across the Atlantic came approving voices. Edward Everett wrote of a dispute between Hallam and Thomas Grenville over the question of style. Was that of the "Conquest" superior to that of "Ferdinand and Isabella"? Hallam thought so. Grenville was inclined to stand by his former preference. What it was, Everett stated in his address on Prescott before the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1859: "Calling one day on the venerable Mr. Thomas Grenville, whom I found in his library (the second in size and value of the private libraries of England) reading Xenophon's 'Anabasis' in the original, I made some passing remark on the beauty of that work. 'Here,' said he, holding up a volume of 'Ferdinand and Isabella,' 'is one far superior.'"

From Hamburg, Francis Lieber wrote, on November 9, 1844: —

"I had the pleasure of seeing A. Humboldt at Pottsdam, and of hearing from his lips the

praise of you. We talked a good deal of your works, and I was delighted to find that his opinion agreed in every point, so far as our conversation went, with mine. . . .

"Humboldt agreed with me that your 'Ferdinand and Isabella' is, so far as the taste of the historian is concerned, the first work of all which have appeared on either side of the water these many years."

Robert C. Winthrop, in a letter from Paris, told Prescott that "Mignet greeted me most cordially as *l'ami de Prescott.*" Messages came again from Thierry.

Reporters of English praise were many. George Bancroft wrote from London, July 20, 1847: —

"There is but one opinion. They speak without jealousy, and you are almost the only American person, state, or thing that they commend without reserve."

An extract may be given from a letter by Miss Edgeworth: —

"What pleasure and pride, honest, proper pride, you must feel, my dear Mr. Prescott, in the sense of difficulty conquered, — of diffi-

culties innumerable vanquished by the perseverance and fortitude of genius! It is a fine example to human nature; and will form to great works genius in the rising generation and in ages yet unborn.

"What a new and ennobling view of posthumous fame! — a view which short-sighted, narrow-minded mediocrity cannot reach, and probably would call romantic; but which the noble-minded realize to themselves, and ask not either the sympathy or the comprehension of the commonplace mean ones.

"You need not apologize for speaking of yourself to the world. No one in the world whose opinion is worth looking to will ever think or call this 'egotism.'"

In his journal Prescott noted, under date of February 3, 1844: —

"Letter to Ticknor from Lyell, 'everybody in London is reading the "C. of M.,"' and old Professor Smyth writes to T., 'its arrival is most welcome, for Mr. P. is considered in this country as the first of modern historians.' This from such a quarter is not to be laid on the shelf. But the favorable impression which

the work seems to have made in England does not please me more than a passage in a letter of Mr. George Sumner, now in Spain, to his brother. Mr. S., with whom I am unacquainted, says: —

"'Only a few days since, at a session of the Academia de Bellas Artes in Seville, I was welcomed by all, from the President down to the porter, and welcomed *como conciudadano* del Señor Prescott.' This tribute from the people to whose annals I have devoted myself, is very grateful to me."

Another entry gives an extract from a letter by George Sumner containing Irving's opinion on the "Conquest of Mexico" which Prescott said that he valued next to Humboldt's. Irving was reported: —

"I have just received Prescott's 'Conquest of Mexico.' I had already perused it in proof sheets lent me by Mr. Calderon de la Barca. It is an admirable work and fully sustains the high reputation he acquired by his 'Ferdinand and Isabella.' It has the advantage, too, of being quite different as to the nature of the theme, so as to afford a variety in the exercise

of his pen. I shall now look forward with confident anticipations of delight to the history of 'Philip the Second' which he is about to undertake, and which will open a new field for his talent. The two works he has produced are signal triumphs for our literature, which will be repeated in every language of the civilized world."

Humboldt himself came forward with his tribute: —

February, 1845. "Rec'd a letter from Baron Humboldt — a gratifying testimonial of his approval of my Mexican labors. He says he has gone over the book line by line, with a critical eye, and professes his intention to have translated it, but was anticipated. May be so — may be not. But at all events, such a letter from this quarter is as high a recompense as I can receive — in this way. But it loses its peculiar value to me, for my father cannot read it with me."

Unspoiled by praise, Prescott thought chiefly of the pleasure which the honor done him would give to others. Thus on April 23, 1845, he noted: —

"In my laziness I forgot to record at the time the greatest academic honor I have received — the greatest I shall ever receive — my election as corresponding member of the French Institute of the Academy of Moral and Political Science. I was chosen to fill the vacancy made by the death of the illustrious Navarrete. . . . By the last steamer I received a diploma also from the Royal Academy of Berlin as corresponding member of the Class of Philosophy and History. This body, over which Humboldt presides, and which has been made famous by the learned labors of Niebuhr, Raumer, Ranke, etc., etc., ranks next to the Institute among the greatest Academies of the Continent. Such testimonies from a distant land are the real rewards of the scholar. What pleasure would they have given to my dear father! I feel as if they came too late!"

In a final note on the flattering reception of his "Conquest of Mexico" by both the public and scholars, Prescott wrote, characteristically, "It is somewhat enervating, and has rather an unwholesome effect to *podder*

long over these personalities. The best course is action — things not self — at all events not self-congratulation. So now I propose to dismiss all further thoughts of my literary success."

CHAPTER XII

THE "CONQUEST OF PERU"

PRESCOTT'S "Peru" was of the nature of a by-product. Much of the materials — Muñoz, Navarrete, and the others — that gave him Cortes gave him also Pizarro. The historian pressed on quickly after his "Mexico" and wrote his thousand octavo pages on the "Conquest of Peru" in what was, for him, the short space of two years. This did not mean scamped work. It signified, rather, collections in hand and mastery of method. He was himself humorously appalled at his rapid progress.

"I began composition Wednesday; finished Saturday noon; about three days, or more than twelve pages print *per diem*. I never did so much, I think, before in the same time, though I have done more in a single day. At this rate, I should work up the 'Peru' — the two volumes — in just about two months. Lord, deliver me! What a fruitful author I might

become, were I so feloniously intent! *Felo de se*, it would be more than all others."

July 28, 1845. "At this rate I shall turn off a brace of octavos a year! . . . It would not be decent, nor politic, to turn out histories like romances — people would not believe them! — any more than the writers of them do. For do our best — what is truth — and where? Not in the records of stupid soldiers, false priests, and credulous chroniclers."

August 15, 1845. "Great doings for so long a stretch — and would carry me through more than 1000 pages per annum! . . . Lucky for the world I am not starving!"

December 26, 1845. "If I can once get in harness and at work I shall do well — but my joints are stiff, I think, as I grow old. So, to give myself a start, I have made a wager with Otis that I will reel off at least one page per diem for four months. . . . If I can't do this, it must be a gone case and Pizarro may look to have his misdeeds shown up by a better pen. . . . When I have the great reign of Philip the Prudent to prosecute, I will, God willing, conclude 'The History of the Conquest of

Peru' by December 31, '46. . . . Shame on me if I fail."

January 11, 1846. "A miracle — I have kept my resolve thus far and been industrious three whole days! Now, *meliora spero*."

He was none too deeply in love with his subject — "second-rate," he voted it to himself; "quarrels of banditti over their spoils." He also felt an artistic lack in his theme: —

April 23, 1845. "Its great defect is want of unity. . . . A consecutive tissue of adventures, . . . but not the especial interest that belongs to the 'Iliad' and to the 'Conquest of Mexico,' — a story, by the way, which Chevalier, in his critique, rightly regards as superior to the 'Iliad' in true epic proportion and capabilities. . . . Variety, variety is the secret of interest. Expectation is another. . . . Deal candidly but with stern candor in describing the deeds and misdeeds of the Conquerors; and never call hard names, à la Southey. It is unhistorical, unphilosophical, ungentlemanlike. . . . But beware of Robertson. Never glance at him till after subject moulded in my mind and thrown into language."

Swift, but in accordance with law, to use his favorite quotation from the Italian poet, he pushed on his work, finishing it only two months after his vowed Christmas of 1846.

One more indication of Prescott's industry at this period may be taken from his private records: —

May 4, 1846. "My fiftieth birthday; a half century! This is getting on with a vengeance. It is one of those frightful halting-places in a man's life, that may make him reflect a little. But half a century is too long a road to be looked over in half an hour; so I will defer it — till when? But what have I done the last year? Not misspent much of it. The first eleven months, from April 26th, 1845, to March 26th, 1846, I wrote five hundred and twenty pages, text and notes, of my 'Conquest of Peru.' The quantity is sufficient, and, in the summer especially, my industry was at fever-heat. But I fear I have pushed the matter indiscreetly."

The indiscretion was in overstraining his eye. He injured it severely, "Heaven knows how," he wrote, "probably by manuscript-

digging." His resolve was to depend more and more upon the vision of others. Not much later than this, after taking advice from the best oculists of the day in New York and Boston, he determined to "relinquish *all* use of the eye for the future in studies, and to be content if I can preserve it for the more vulgar purposes of life."

The "Conquest of Peru" was published in March, 1847. The Harpers paid him $7500 on the day of publication — at the rate of one dollar a copy — terms, Ticknor remarks, "more liberal than had ever been offered for a work of grave history on this side of the Atlantic." The English rights were bought by Bentley for $4000. Before this, Prescott had made a note on the value of his copyrights.

May 4, 1846. "The Harpers give me good accounts of my works. They consider my copyrights as worth no less than $25,000 apiece. If I allow only half that sum, which I should be very loath to take for them, the amount, with about $30,000 I have already received on the two histories, will swell up to a very pretty little *honorarium* for my literary lum-

ber. . . . My hours have been since my return [from New York] a fortnight ago sadly broken up by sitting for my portrait to West — not for myself but for some unknown who has thought it worth paying for. It is a cruel moth, eating up time and temper. But it will go hard before I sit for another. Yet I should like to get one satisfactory likeness — as those hitherto taken have not pleased my friends."

Prescott had pleasant personal relations with a young man destined to become the first authority on Peru. Clements (afterwards Sir Clements) R. Markham wrote from London on March 5, 1856 : —

"The perusal of your charming 'Conquest' at a time when I was serving on the west coast of South America first gave me a wish to see Cuzco, and steadily keeping this wish in view I was on my road to gratify it when I had the pleasure of spending a few agreeable days at Pepperell in 1852."

It was in reference to this visit that Markham testified of Prescott: —

"He it was who encouraged me to undertake my Peruvian investigations, and to perse-

vere in them. To his friendly advice and assistance I owe more than I can say, and to him is due, in no small degree, the value of anything I have since been able to do in furtherance of Peruvian research."

Markham's mature verdict on Prescott's "Peru" was ("Academy," No. 95): "It deservedly stands in the first rank as a judicious history of the Conquest." This competent critic does not deny, in his masterly elucidations of early Peruvian history, that Prescott needs largely to be supplemented in all that relates to Inca civilization. Of the elaborate researches now available, the historian of sixty years ago was necessarily ignorant. But he knew all that was to be known at the time; he sifted his authorities with enormous diligence and much acumen; and produced a work which, while contributing only a little to the philosophy of history, brought out stores of information conveyed in animated narrative.

Among the many letters which the "Conquest of Peru" brought Prescott, only one, not before published, need be referred to here. It touches American literature on the quaint

side. R. G. Haliburton writes from Halifax, April 9, 1857, saying that he is engaged in investigating the popular customs of various peoples and in trying to trace them to their source. He submits to Prescott two questions: —

1. Was the Peruvian plough in the form of a cross?

2. A certain instrument (described) was found in the hand of a statue discovered by Stephens in Central America; could Mr. Prescott give him any light upon the question of its use and significance?

CHAPTER XIII

THE ENGLISH VISIT

In the journal for June 16, 1839, occurs this entry: "Received a pleasant letter from Mr. Kenyon, who quotes Sydney Smith as saying that if I shall visit London, and can't swim, I shall be drowned, either in their claret or turtle soup."

Prescott's quiet addition was: —

"I believe I can swim in those seas."

But it was long before he made the plunge. The European reputation which his "Ferdinand and Isabella" won him, together with his exchange of private letters with scholars, early brought Prescott many and warm invitations to go abroad. These he steadily withstood, though often after much hesitation, and it was not until 1850 that he yielded, partly on physicians' advice. Extracts from his journal show his decisions — and his vacillations — on the subject: —

January 26, 1841. "Now why should I not go ahead? Because I am thinking of going to England! . . . My mind is distracted with the pros and cons."

March 11, 1841. "Have decided at length — after as much doubt and deliberation as most people would take for a voyage round the world — and decided not to go to England. . . . I consider my free, full, and final determination now as settling the question forever, respecting a visit to Europe, whither I shall never go nor think of going, except for important business *exacting* it — or with my own family."

June 1, 1846. "I wish also to be free for a voyage there [England] if I so dispose, next Spring."

Sailing from New York on the 22d of May, 1850, Prescott had a seasick passage. Though spending so large a part of his summers by the sea, he was a poor sailor, and he wrote to his wife from the steamer Niagara, June 3: —

"Nothing can redeem the utter wretchedness of a sea life — and never will I again put my foot in a steamer, except for Yankee land,

and, if I were not ashamed, should reëmbark in the Saturday steamer from Liverpool, and settle the wager in another fortnight."

He also wrote: —

"This sea life is even worse than I thought it was. I had forgotten half its miseries. I will never trust a man hereafter who talks complacently of it. As to Kirk [his private secretary] he has been actively sick ever since we left Halifax. For myself, I have had a basis of nausea that turns my stomach against everything I usually like. Chewing camomile is my best satisfaction — almost as bad off as Milton's devils with their dust apples."

But from the moment of landing in Liverpool he was in the warmest air of English hospitality, and, throughout his stay, was overwhelmed with the most flattering attentions by the leaders of society and the lights of the learned world. A large bundle of the invitations which the season brought him is preserved among his papers. He was, in fact, one of the lions of the year. When Lockhart met him, it was with the remark, "You and the Nepaulese ambassador are the lions of London, I believe."

"And the Hippopotamus," Prescott added readily. His Nepaulese rival he described to his wife: "He is walking about here at the evening parties with a huge necklace of rough emeralds, a scarlet petticoat well garnished with pearls, and a head-gear made of the beak of a bird, six inches high."

Ticknor was not far wrong in saying that Prescott's was "the most brilliant visit ever made to England by an American citizen not clothed with the prestige of official station." The justifying letters are largely given in the two chapters devoted to the episode in the "Life." Ticknor took certain liberties with the text. His severe pen struck out passages wherein the Yankee levity of his compatriot seemed too daring — especially when in the presence of royal personages. Thus Prescott's description of the young queen at Castle Howard is amusingly toned down and now and then boldly altered. It is evident that, through all the round of sight-seeing and entertainment the historian remained wholly himself. Whether with his titled friends, or in the company of Hallam and Macaulay, Ford and

Thackeray, Rogers and Milman, he lost neither his native charm nor his native simplicity and shrewdness. Going to England with a high "preconceived estimate of the English character," he found it raised by his experience. Yet he allowed his critical faculty full play as respects "the great-little island," and felt the pull of his native land through all. "I was not in my own dear wild America," he wrote to his wife, when explaining his longing to see "a ragged fence or an old stump, or a bit of rock, or even a stone as big as one's fist," in the passage through the well-kept country between Liverpool and London.

A few intimate bits may be rescued from the letters which Ticknor passed by: —

LONDON, June 7, 1850.

It was a rich cit's dinner — dull eno' — and concluded by a clergyman — a great gun here — making an exposition of a verse or two of "Revelations" — a hopeful theme. In the midst of the lecture a mischievous clock in the room struck ten — and at once went off with a waltz, running it off merrily, as if to

distance the preacher. The poor host was in great alarm — tried in vain to throttle the imp; the more he tried, the louder the tunes it played; till the good divine was fairly silenced. Is it not a strange style of things at a dinner? But they tell me here it is not likely I shall meet with such an experience again.

LONDON, June 9, 1850.

In the latter part of the evening, as I was talking with the Duchess of Leeds — one of the Catons (Louisa) who has grown coarser, with a bad complexion — a rather striking-looking Jewish cast of physiognomy, with long love-locks, attracted my eye, and she said, "That is Disraeli, would you like to know him?" "Pray," said he, "are you related to the great American author — the author of the Spanish Histories?" I squeezed his arm, telling him that I could not answer for the greatness, but I was the man himself; and though at first he was a little confused — as one or two near smiled at the blunder — we had a merry chat.

June 11, 1850.

The lunch [with Ford] was all Spanish, — Spanish wines, — delicious; Spanish dishes, which good breeding forced me to taste, but no power could force me to eat, for they were hotter than the Inquisition.

June 30, 1850.

The Prince did me the honor to say a few words to me. He asked me, of course, how long I had been here, said he believed this was not my first visit to the country, and expressed his satisfaction that I had now repeated my visit. To all which I replied with wonderful presence of mind, "Your Royal Highness does me honor." I was introduced, by the bye, at Hallam's the other day, to a gentleman whom I thought he called Ld. Aberdeen. Hallam in introducing me made a little flourish about my being already known, etc., and as I like to give tit for tat on such occasions, as far as may be, I said, "And the name of the person to whom I have the honor of being introduced is also known wherever the Anglo-Saxon race is to be found." Afterwards at dinner I

observed that this individual with whom I had then no further talk, seemed very shy whenever I attempted to address him across the table. On my asking the lady next me if this was not Lord Aberdeen she said it was Lord Harry Vane.

LONDON, July 18, 1850.

Lockhart showed us the diary of Sir Walter. He (Lockhart) had two copies of it printed for himself. One of them was destroyed in printing the memoir, for which he made extracts. One he did not make because the party was living. It was this: "We dined at Sam Rogers' etc. He told me that it was recommended to print the Italian on the opposite pages of Rose's translation of Ariosto, in order the better to understand the English."

LONDON, September 4, 1850.

Just seen old Rogers, for the last time, — Cato the Censor Atticized. He was in his drawing-room, preparing to go to Brighton, and says he has humbugged the world this time.

Rogers had been desperately ill and not expected to live — hence the "humbug."

For a contemporary English account of the impression which Prescott made upon the English society in which he was so welcome, an extract may be taken from a privately printed memoir by Sir William Stirling: —

"Amongst the many occasions when it was the good fortune of the author of this sketch to meet Mr. Prescott, there is one which has especially stamped itself on his memory. It was on a delightful summer day, at a dinner given at the 'Trafalgar,' at Greenwich, by Mr. Murray, of Albemarle Street. Of that small and well-chosen circle, the brightest lights are, alas! already quenched. The festive humor of Ford will no more enliven the scene he loved so well; nor will the wit of Lockhart and the wisdom of Hallam evermore brighten or adorn banquets like that at which they met their fellow-laborer from the New World. Everything was in perfection, — the weather, the preliminary stroll beneath the great chestnut-trees in Greenwich Park, the cool upper room with its balcony overhanging the river, the dinner, from the prefatory water-souchy to the ultimate deviled white-bait, the assortment,

spirits, and conversation of the guests. On our return to town in the cool of the summer night, it was the good fortune of the present writer to sit beside Mr. Prescott, on the box of the omnibus which Mr. Murray had chartered for his party. It was there that the historian related to him the fortunes of his first historical work. He likewise described with great zest a more recent incident of his life. Some days before that, he had dined with the late Sir Robert Peel. With the punctuality which was very noticeable amidst all the bustle of Mr. Prescott's endless London engagements, he was in Whitehall gardens at the precise moment indicated on the card of invitation. It followed, as a natural result, that he was for some minutes the sole occupant of the drawing-room. In due time, Sir Robert walked in, very bland and a little formal, somewhat more portly than he appeared on the canvas of Lawrence, somewhat less rotund than he was wont to be figured in the columns of 'Punch.' Although not personally known to his host, Mr. Prescott took for granted that his name had been announced. It was to his great surprise, there-

fore, that he found himself addressed in French. He replied in the same language, inly musing whether he had been mistaken for somebody else, or whether to speak French to all persons from beyond the sea was the etiquette of British statesmanship, or the private predilection of Peel. After some introductory topics had been got over, he was still further mystified by finding the dialogue turned towards the drama, and being complimented on his great success in that unfamiliar walk of letters. The astonished historian was making the reply which his native modesty dictated, when a second guest, a friend of his own, entered, and addressed both of them in English. Mr. Prescott had been mistaken for M. Scribe, — a blunder ludicrous enough to those who know the contrast that existed between the handsome person of the historian, and the undistinguished appearance of the most prolific of modern playwrights. By a curious chance, M. Scribe did not arrive until a large party of political and literary celebrities were seated at dinner, and Mr. Prescott concluded his story by remarking

on the graceful kindness with which Sir Robert hastened to meet him at the door, and smoothed the foreigner's way to a place amongst strangers."

CHAPTER XIV

PERSONAL TRAITS

GEORGE HILLARD, writing to Prescott in 1844, spoke impulsively of "that warm heart of yours which makes those who have the privilege of being your friends entirely forget that you are a great historian, and only think of you as a person to be loved." This is but one of a hundred testimonies to Prescott's extraordinary personal charm that might be cited. He was a universal social favorite. "If I were asked," said Theophilus Parsons, "to name the man whom I have known whose coming was most sure to be hailed as a pleasant event by all whom he approached, I should not only place Prescott at the head of the list, but I could not place any other man near him." It was not that he was a professional diner-out, still less the even more portentous being, a professional teller of stories and retailer of smart sayings. Prescott used sometimes to make

horrible puns, it is true, but his social manner had its immense attraction mainly through unfailing kindness, unerring sympathy, and vivacious good spirits which nothing could depress. It was his simplicity and spontaneity which delighted everybody. This is illustrated by a letter from Mr. G. T. Curtis to Mr. Hillard. "Prescott, the historian," he writes, "not yet an author, was at that time in the full flush of his early manhood, running over with animal spirits, which his studies and self-discipline could not quench; talking with a joyous *abandon*, laughing at his own inconsequences, recovering himself gayly, and going on again in a graver strain, which soon gave way to some new joke or brilliant sally. Wherever *he* came there was always a 'fillip' to the discourse, be it of books or society, or reminiscences of foreign travel, or the news of the day."

Sometimes this native spontaneity of his betrayed him into an unconscious *malapropos*. "What have I said?" he would cry out when he saw his wife, who kept a dutiful watch upon these lapses of his, looking at him severely. Once a titled Englishwoman was arguing with

him in his own home on the subject of Americanisms. She objected strongly to our use of the word "snarl" in the sense of confusion. "Why, surely," spoke up Prescott in all innocence, "you would say that your ladyship's hair is in a snarl?" As such unfortunately was the case at the moment — and it was the day of smooth braids and polished bands — the visitor had to cool her wrath by remembering that her host was blind. He used to enjoy little dinners which he called "cronyings." His friend from boyhood, Gardiner, describes one of the latest of these occasions: —

"It was at my own house, either on the last day of January, or one of the earliest days of February, 1858. It was a party so small that it hardly deserves the name. Prescott and two of his most intimate friends, besides myself and my family, were all who filled a small round table. He had suffered during the past year from frequent and severe headaches; a source of more uneasiness to his friends than to himself, for he never attributed these headaches to what the event proved them to be. He

thought them either neuralgic, or a new phase of his old enemy, rheumatism; nothing that required extraordinary care. For a few days past he had been unusually free from them, and this day he was particularly bright and clear. From the beginning he was in one of his most lively and amusing moods. The ladies were induced by it to linger longer at the table than usual. When they had left, the whole company was reduced to only a party of four, but of very old friends, each of whom was stored with many reminiscences of like occasions, running far back into younger days. Prescott overflowed with the full tide of mirth belonging to those days. It was a gush of rare enjoyment. After nearly five years, the date at which I write, I cannot recall a thing that was said. Probably nothing was said in itself worth recalling, nothing that would bear to stand alone on cold paper. But all that quick-wittedness, lively repartee, sparkling humor, exceeding *naïveté*, and droll manner of saying droll things, for which he was so remarkable when he let himself out with perfect freedom, were brought into full play. And then he

of the family; the drive or the walk; the gay dinner; the evening with readings, but oftener and more delightfully with games and songs." One game in particular was an especial favorite with Prescott. It was called Albano, because introduced by some young friends of his who had played it in Rome. It was really only a variant of Puss in the Corner. The players chose names from the four quarters of the globe; but the one which Prescott took, and which he never shouted out without provoking tumultuous outbursts of glee, was Nessitisset. It was the name of the stream flowing by his farm. Eliot also tells of a comic dispute which once occurred at Pepperell between Prescott and his uncle, Isaac Davis. The old gentleman complained of growing deaf, but Prescott maintained that his uncle's hearing was as good as his own. To decide the matter, he had his wife hang an old-fashioned watch at the end of the room, and the two men advanced slowly towards it to determine which could first hear the ticking. "Do you hear it, Davis?" "No." "Neither do I." So on, step by step, until in amazement Prescott put his ear actually

laughed, as he only could laugh, at next to nothing, when he was in one of these moods, and made us inevitably laugh too, almost as the Cambridge professor did according to his own story. He stayed, too, considerably beyond his usual time, the rarest of all things with him. But he had come bent on having 'a good time,' — it was so long, he said, since he had had one, — and laid out for it accordingly.

"On comparing notes a few days afterwards with the two friends who were present, we all agreed that we had not seen 'the great historian' for years in such a state of perfect youthful abandonment."

From the pen of Samuel Eliot we have an account of the home life of Prescott at his country place in Pepperell. Here the man of whom a friend said that he "could be happy in more ways and more happy in every one of them than any other person I have ever known," passed his happiest hours. Work went on as usual, but did not seem to be his principal interest. This lay in "the enjoyment of the family and the friends forming a portion

of the family; the drive or the walk; the gay dinner; the evening with readings, but oftener and more delightfully with games and songs." One game in particular was an especial favorite with Prescott. It was called Albano, because introduced by some young friends of his who had played it in Rome. It was really only a variant of Puss in the Corner. The players chose names from the four quarters of the globe; but the one which Prescott took, and which he never shouted out without provoking tumultuous outbursts of glee, was Nessitisset. It was the name of the stream flowing by his farm. Eliot also tells of a comic dispute which once occurred at Pepperell between Prescott and his uncle, Isaac Davis. The old gentleman complained of growing deaf, but Prescott maintained that his uncle's hearing was as good as his own. To decide the matter, he had his wife hang an old-fashioned watch at the end of the room, and the two men advanced slowly towards it to determine which could first hear the ticking. "Do you hear it, Davis?" "No." "Neither do I." So on, step by step, until in amazement Prescott put his ear actually

to the timepiece. "Susan! the thing is n't going!" he cried to the sly woman who had stopped it.

"He is forty-five," wrote Sumner of Prescott in 1841, "but with the freedom and warmth and frolic of a boy." This boyish spirit and welling gayety Prescott carried into his work as well as his social relaxation. One of his secretaries wrote that whenever the historian came to describe some stirring scene, like a battle, he would humorously key himself up to it by bursting into song. One favorite was a ballad, beginning, "O, give me but my Arab steed!" He was fond of music. Sentimental songs would sometimes set him weeping. "They are only my opera tears," he would explain. This was one sign of that "simplicity in which nobleness of nature most largely shares," to quote the words of Thucydides which Professor Felton applied to Prescott after his death. Such tributes could be indefinitely multiplied. "One of the most frank, amiable, warm-hearted, and open-hearted of human beings," wrote Hillard; and added, "Of all men I have known he was most generally beloved." It might be

said of Prescott, as Sydney Smith said of Mackintosh, that "the gall-bladder was omitted in his composition." "Not a single unkind or harsh or sneering expression," testifies one of his secretaries, "could be found in any of the hundreds of letters I wrote at his dictation." The same may be said of his private journals. Not a line of them need be blotted. This man had that even sweetness of temper and exhaustless benevolence which can endure the searching test of impressions made upon children and servants. He was not a hero to his valet, but was something better — a man to win the undying respect and love of all who served him in humblest offices. All his private secretaries had an almost unbounded affection for him. To children, his appearance was like a burst of sunshine. He could instantly become the playfellow of the youngest. He himself had a sweet tooth. In his early travels he carefully noted, after sampling, the confectionery of the various countries he visited. Until within a few years a Boston druggist was living who used to supply Prescott regularly with licorice root — that child's dainty of a ruder

age! His grandchildren recall the little packets of it which, with other sweets, he always had ready for them.

With his innocent fondness for the good things of life, and his expansive social nature, Prescott often found it difficult to adhere to hours and plans of work. He did not, with Tyndall, hold society to be the great enemy of science, yet he sometimes found the tax paid to friendship onerous. A boon companion of his youth gives an early instance of the way in which pleasure struggled with his rule of quitting any company by ten o'clock.

"Mr. Prescott was the entertainer, at a restaurateur's, of an invited company of young men of the *bon vivant* order. He took that mode sometimes of giving a return dinner to avoid intruding too much on the hospitality of his father's roof, as well as to put at ease the sort of company which promised exuberant mirth. His dinner hour was set early; purposely, no doubt, that all might be well over in good season. But it proved to be a prolonged festivity. Under the brilliant auspices of their host, who was never in higher spirits,

the company became very gay, and not at all disposed to abridge their gayety, even after a reasonable number of hours. As the hour of ten drew near, I noticed that Prescott was beginning to get a little fidgety, and to drop some hints, which no one seemed willing to take, — for no one present, unless it were myself, was aware that time was of any more importance to our host than it was to many of his guests. Presently, to the general surprise, the host himself got up abruptly, and addressed the company nearly as follows: 'Really, my friends, I am very sorry to be obliged to tear myself from you at so very unreasonable an hour; but you seem to have got your sitting-breeches on for the night. I left mine at home, and must go. But I am sure you will be very soon in no condition to miss *me*, — especially as I leave behind that excellent representative,' — pointing to a basket of several yet uncorked bottles, which stood in a corner. 'Then you know,' he added, 'you are just as much at home in this house as I am. You can call for what you like. Don't be alarmed, — I mean on *my* account. I aban-

don to you, without reserve, all my best wine, my credit with the house, and my reputation to boot. Make free with them all, I beg of you, — and, if you don't go home till morning, I wish you a merry night of it.' With this he was off, and the Old South clock, hard by, was heard to strike ten at the instant."

A few extracts from the journals will further light up this point: —

November 10, 1839. "Diverted too much by passing objects — children's recitations, talking, etc. Another year arrange what hours children may occupy the library [at Pepperell] — how often ask questions about their lessons, and allow a definite time for them — not to be exceeded." . . .

February 6, 1842. "Have not been superindustrious — on the contrary, I have got through with Dickens, who dined with me yesterday, and as the lions are all done up, I suspect, for the season, I will be true and hearty, almost exclusive, in my own work — till May 4, say, my birthday. My daily labor and my thoughts by night. Eschew company, especially dining." . . .

September 4, 1842. "Company — company — company! It will make me a misanthrope. And yet there is something very interesting and instructive in the conversation of travelers from distant regions. Last week we had Calderon — just from Mexico — Stephens from Central America and Yucatan, General Harlan from Afghanistan, where he commanded the native troops for many years. But what has it all to do with the 'Conquest of Mexico'?" . . .

September 8, 1842. "I am here [Pepperell] 40 miles from all enemies — and friends, worse than enemies — except a few dear ones." . . .

November 16, 1842. "I will see if I can't adopt some rules which shall secure me as much time in town as country." . . .

June 24, 1843. "Nahant! To-day I have been settling, clearing the decks for action. Now if I don't make the powder and shot fly! I will be out to everybody. I will have but one idea. I will be a free man by September — first week. I will not invite nor will I go out to dine, and very rarely have company — once or twice only — and that only at Nahant, and not sit

long then. I will answer letters short hand, and economize every way, eyes and time. . . . The very day of this entry a stranger came to Nahant and, being refused admittance — I being 'out' — staid over night and passed all the evening with us. He came, he said, to Boston to see me, so what could I do less? What then becomes of the Conquest? οἰ μοὶ It is no joke." . . .

December 14, 1845. "Twaddle — twaddle! . . . I will make regular hebdomadal entries of my laziness. I think I can't stand the repetition of such records long. . . . I may find some apology in the *demi*-winter days, and in an influx of visiting friends in my new quarters — and be hanged to them — not the quarters, but the friends." . . .

October 1, 1855. "Pepperell. I shall have at least the sense of sweet security from friends — the worst foes to time."

The kindest and most considerate of men, Prescott inherited much of the active philanthropy of his mother. He was interested in many public charities. Particularly to the Perkins Institution for the Blind did he give

time and money. "Much occupied the last ten days with the affairs of the Blind," is an entry of May 9, 1833, not without its pathetic suggestion. He had his private pensioners as well, some of whom were passed on to him, so to speak, from that lady bountiful, his mother. One of his secretaries tells us that he regularly gave away one tenth of his income. The latter was figured, in the late forties (of course, after his father had died), at upwards of $12,000 a year. It spelled luxury for the times. Prescott's methods in almsgiving were not always, one fears, such as would commend themselves to the Charity Organization Society. Here is a specimen of his minute accounts, written down after taking a walk: —

"Apple 2 — newspaper 2 — gloves 1.00 — charity 25." During his stay in London he employed a valet, one Penn ("a Penn I will not cut," was his punning aside to his wife), who, he wrote home, would be "perfectly invaluable if he did not drink, to which he has an amiable inclination." There is something human in the addition, "I will let him get drunk once before I part with him."

Prescott's Boston home was for twenty-eight years with his father on Bedford Street. The house was spacious and the scene of warm hospitality. "Shall I ever forget," wrote Lady Lyell to Prescott in 1857, "the Thanksgiving in Bedford Street? Never, as long as I live. It is now more than fifteen years ago, but still I see the rooms, the dinner table, the blind-man's-buff, and the adjournment to your study to see Lord Kingsborough's 'Mexico.'" After Judge Prescott's death, the son bought, in 1845, the house on Beacon Street, No. 55, where the remainder of his life was passed. A vivid reminder of the changes which time has brought in the city's topography may be had from a descriptive sentence of Prescott's own: "My house is in Beacon Street looking on the Common, which is an uncommonly fine situation, commanding a noble view of land and water."

But he never passed the entire twelvemonth in the city. Indeed, his personal preference would appear to have been for life in the country throughout the year. "I have found the country favorable to industry, health, and general cheerfulness,"

October 6, 1844. "How much more correct is the estimate one makes of life and the objects of life — of character and of pleásures, in the silent solitudes of the country, than in the bustling haunts and senseless hurly-burly of the city! And with my contemplated pursuits how much more congenial! Yet should I not be lonely without a family around me?"

It was, in fact, the educational advantages for his children which the city could offer that turned the scale. Still he clung to the country for what he called his "chronic" residence, prolonging the season out of town. Besides the ancestral house at Pepperell, he had a cottage at Nahant where he used to spend the earlier summer months. About this home he had two minds. Sometimes it was a "paradise." Again, when fogs and chill air made his rheumatism more acute, he was tempted to say that it should be "nae haunt of mine." Indeed, in the later years of his life, he gave up the site on the rocky promontory, and bought a house on the shore of Lynn Bay, six miles away. The many months thus passed

by the sea probably account for the nautical metaphors frequent in Prescott's letters and journals; but it does not appear that he was fond of sailing. His favorite exercise was walking and riding. At Nahant "Prescott's Walk" is still pointed out, and he used to do miles back and forth under the trees at Pepperell. Horseback riding he kept up with the utmost regularity. An entry in the journal shows the regimen of one who might have posed for Emerson's "athletic scholar."

August 10, 1845. "Ride in saddle before breakfast, 1½ h. Walk ½ h. at noon under my orchard shade. Drive 1½ h. in evening. Walk a mile. So, pretty fair for exercise."

The historian's method of work has been described in preceding pages. It was imposed upon him through his having, like Thierry, to "make friends with darkness." One result was to develop an extraordinary power of memory. He not only composed while riding or walking, but carried whole pages, even chapters, in his head with verbal accuracy. He could even amend and alter as freely as if

the written page lay before him. What range and grasp his memory had at its prime may be inferred from knowing that, when on the third volume of "Philip II," he complained of the fact that he could not perfectly command more than forty printed pages as a proof of failing powers. At the time of his father's death he noted that the "shock" wiped out the pages he then had in mind "as completely as though with a sponge." His library and study were real workshops. A homely touch is given by one of his private secretaries, who tells us that twenty pairs of old shoes were piled on a step-ladder that stood in a corner. Prescott's journal he kept largely out of methodic bent. But he once wrote in it: —

June 28, 1849. "I have ever found it a great stimulus to industry to be able to talk thus to myself. But I cannot do this if there is another looking over my shoulder — if I write for another to transcribe."

And again: —

"Let the entries be brief and practical, and set down naught from vanity, which would be very silly and misplaced here. Yet when will

not that pitiful failing creep in? Was there ever a creature too humble not to have some store of it?"

The admonitory entries are as thick in Prescott's diary as they were in Dr. Johnson's. One amusing resort of his to flog himself along was his habit of imposing a money forfeit upon the failure to complete a given task by a day fixed. This device he appears to have taken up while still in college. Very early in his journals we find traces of the custom. Thus one of his "Maxims of Composition" written down almost at the beginning reads: "Pay a forfeit if you read a word as you are writing it — if you look over the last 3 lines you have written, except it be impossible after trying to recollect them (you may at last 3 words), if you review any except 2 pages when I begin to write in the day. . . . I may read what has been written on the same day in which I take this liberty, provided it *shall be absolutely necessary to write further.*" Later, he commuted his system of forfeits into a plan of making wagers (the odds heavily against himself) with his private secretaries. A memo-

randum of one of them survives, and runs as follows: —

"June 4th 1846. This memorandum is to witness that a bet of one dollar to fifty dollars has been made between E. B. Otis and Wm H. Prescott Esq., the latter betting fifty dollars that he will read for, compose and write one hundred pages of his 'History of Peru' in a hundred days, the days to be counted from the fourth day of June, 1846, inclusive, making due allowance for the excepted days hereinafter specified.

"This bet shall be renewed at the end of the hundred days (the amount, conditions and exceptions of the second bet being the same in every particular with those herein recited); *unless Mr. Prescott shall, within two days from the expiration of the first period of a hundred days, enter on this memorandum a written statement of his desire to dissolve the Bet.* If the History, including the Postscripts, should not hold out, but should fall short of the second hundred pages, the wager shall be construed *pro rata*, that is, Mr. Prescott shall lose his second bet of fifty dollars unless he

finishes the remainder of his History at the rate of a page a day, (reckoning the days from the expiration of the first hundred days) for every day after the determination of the first wager till the work is finished, with the following exceptions.

"The days to be excepted when calculating the result of either bet are these, viz:

"When Mr. Prescott is absent from town for a day or more, also a day before and after return, also two days must be allowed for moving to Nahant, to Boston and to Pepperell, — each; or when prevented from study by the sickness of himself or friends for a day or more, or by the occurrence of any unforeseen (to be determined himself) also event, that might occupy him otherwise, the days employed in writing the Memoir of Mr. Pickering; (Writing letters is not an unforeseen event;) also the days that gentlemen visitors stay in the house with Mr. Prescott. No days shall be excepted but those herein specified, and entered on this sheet.

"Weakness of the eyes shall not count as illness unless upon such days as Mr. Prescott

cannot read himself 2 hours and has not his secretary with him, or (the latter, when Mr. Prescott is unable to read said two hours) from any cause is unable to read 3 hours on any day when (Mr. Prescott) is not employed in composing *text* of a chapter and except working (not reading) causes pain.

"If working (exclusive of reading) *causes pain for several days* Mr. Prescott has a right to dissolve this agreement.

"Signed June 4th

"Wm H. Prescott,

"Edmund B. Otis.

"I promise on my honor as a gentleman not to release Mr. Prescott from any forfeiture that he may incur by this engagement except in such cases as are provided for in the contract — this contract being made at his desire for his own accommodation solely.

"Edmund B. Otis.

"Days excepted — June 7–21, 25, 26, 28, July 6–14."

Prescott always took this betting on his own industry with perfect seriousness. Sometimes he would radiantly greet his secretary with "You have lost! You owe me a dollar." And

he would exact payment. Occasionally he would, with woebegone countenance, produce and pay over to the protesting secretary the twenty or thirty dollars he himself had lost. It was Prescott's one "oddity," according to a friend. Madame de Sévigné, who had a similar habit, called it a *sottise*. "Je reviens à nos lectures: c'est sans préjudice de Cléopatre [a romance in twelve octavo volumes] que j'ai gagé d'achever (vous savez comme je soutiens mes gageures): je songe quelquefois d'où vient la folie que j'ai pour ces sottises-là."

Three children survived Prescott. The happy marriage of his daughter Elizabeth to James Lawrence gave him much pleasure, though he wrote: "What shall I do with *two* nurseries — grandchildren and a' that?" His first daughter he lost in childhood. It was for this four-year-old Catherine that, at the end of one of his noctograph letters to his wife, written from Philadelphia, Prescott printed a sentence with most painstaking care: "I love little Kitty, and will buy her a work box in New York if she is a good girl." But on February 1, 1829, this eldest child died. The event

was, to her father, not only a source of profound sorrow, but the occasion of driving him to a close examination of the foundations of his religious faith. "The death of my dearest daughter," he wrote in his journal, "having made it impossible for me at present to resume the task of composition, I have been naturally led to more serious reflection than usual, and have occupied myself in reviewing the evidences of the Christian religion." To this work, with characteristic thoroughness, he devoted many weeks. In company with his father, "an old and cautious lawyer," he read thoroughly the various standard works on the Evidences, for and against. His conclusion was that the Gospel narratives were authentic, though he did not find in them the doctrines commonly accounted orthodox, and deliberately recorded his rejection of the dogmas of "eternal damnation, the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, Election and Original Sin." Theologically, therefore, he confirmed his belief in that more liberal form of Unitarianism in which he had been reared. Practically, he was one to make observers say that his creed could n't be wrong,

so reverent and pure was his life, and so filled with goodness. Yet it was this gentle and tolerant man, abounding in all charity of thought and deed, whom a reviewer in the Baltimore "Catholic Magazine" dubbed a "bigot," while the Dublin "Quarterly Review" breathed a prayer for his "conversion from spiritual error." Prescott's sole comment in his journal was: "As I have always considered charity as the foundation of every honest creed, whether religious or political, I don't believe I deserve the name of bigot."

CHAPTER XV

POLITICAL SYMPATHIES

It was apropos of Prescott, I believe, that John Quincy Adams made the remark, "A great historian has neither politics nor religion." He meant, of course, bias as a writer. But as regards politics, at any rate, it has been commonly thought that the saying was literally true of Prescott. Ticknor dismisses this aspect of the man in a cold sentence or two. Nor, in fact, did Prescott ever take such a close and keen interest in the pageant of present politics, which makes future history, as did, for example, that other historian, Dr. Thomas Arnold. Brought up a conservative Whig, and kept by physical limitations as well as by his chosen pursuits from the hurly-burly of actual participation in public affairs, it was only late in life that he gave evidence of being deeply stirred by the conflict of political doctrines which foreshadowed the Civil War.

At once a test and illustration of his attitude we may see in his relations with Charles Sumner. Friends early and until parted by death, the two men had, at first, little in common, politically. Prescott had a great admiration for Sumner, and stood by him personally and socially when all blue-blooded Boston turned its very cold shoulder upon the man whose radicalism, Ticknor said, had placed him outside "the pale of society." Apropos of this early obloquy, Prescott wrote to Sumner in 1851, reminding him how Judge Story had suffered from "the bitterness of party feeling," and adding, "Boston is worse than New York in this respect." Yet Sumner understood perfectly that Prescott did not go with him politically. Writing to Lord Morpeth in 1847, he said, "Prescott shakes his head because I have anything to do with the thing [slavery]. His insensibility to it is a perfect bathos. This is wrong: I wish you would jar him a little on this side." Yet it was only six years later, when Sumner made his great speech in the Senate on the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, that Prescott wrote, "I don't see but

what all Boston has got round; in fact, we must call Sumner *the* Massachusetts Senator." Brooks's assault on Sumner roused Prescott as no display of the slavery spirit had before done. "You have escaped the crown of martyrdom," he wrote to his friend, "by a narrow chance, and have got all the honors, which are almost as dangerous to one's head as a gutta-percha cane. There are few in old Massachusetts, I can assure you, who do not feel that every blow on your cranium was a blow on them." And when the Senator returned to receive the homage of Boston, Prescott and his family waved a welcome to him, as the procession passed, from the balcony of their Beacon-Street house. Calling on Sumner the next day, the historian told him that if he had known there were to be decorations and inscriptions on the houses he should have placed on his own these words: —

"May 22, 1856.

"'Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.'"

Sumner, on his part, was loyalty itself to the man with whom, as he testified, his relations

"had for years been of peculiar intimacy." "This death," he wrote to Longfellow, when, in France, he heard of Prescott's end, "touches me much. Perhaps no man, so much in people's mouths, was ever the subject of so little unkindness. Something of that immunity which he enjoyed in life must be referred to his beautiful nature, in which enmity could not live." To the widow, five years later, Sumner wrote, on occasion of the publication of Ticknor's "Life of Prescott:" "The past has been revived. . . . I have felt keenly how much I was permitted to enjoy and how much I have lost. Those evenings in the darkened room in Bedford Street, with the kind, sparkling, intimate talk on books, history, friends abroad and at home; the pleasant suppers below, where were the venerable parents, so good and cordial; then as I became absorbed in public affairs, the constant friendship which we maintained; the welcome he always gave me on my return from Washington; our free conversations on public affairs and public men; and perhaps more than all things else his tender sympathy as he sat by my bedside,

revealing how his heart was moved, only a short time before the summons came to himself — all these I think of, and in selfish sorrow I grieve that he is gone."

To piece out the account of Prescott's political associations and gradual change of view, the testimony of his private secretary, Mr. Robert Carter, may be cited. Speaking of their first acquaintance (1847), he wrote, "He was a Conservative Whig as I a Free Soiler." But he adds, "Ten years later, I had the pleasure of knowing that he voted for Frémont for President, and for Burlingame for Congress, notwithstanding his high personal esteem for his friend and neighbor, Mr. Appleton, the candidate opposed to Burlingame." It would be a mistake to class Prescott among abolitionists, or even as pronounced against the aggressions of slavery; but that his nature did not fail to thrill under the indignities heaped upon the free North, is made manifest in a letter which he wrote to an Englishwoman in 1854:—

"We have had most alarming doings here lately in the fugitive slave line. . . . A regiment of the militia was called out, the streets

in certain quarters were *closed* against passengers, and swords and muskets were flashing in our eyes as if we had been in a state of siege.

"I am rather of the conservative order, you know, but I assure you it made my blood boil to see the good town placed under martial law so unceremoniously for no other purpose than to send back a runaway negro to his master. It is a disagreeable business at any time, and it was only a strong conviction of the claims which the South had on us by virtue of the Constitution, which made us one nation, that induced our people to sign the famous Compromise act of 1850. But the Nebraska Bill looks to us so much like double dealing in the matter that there is now a great apathy in regard to our enforcing our own part of the contract. Then the thing was carried here with such a rash hand. The town was turned over to the military by the mayor. . . . Every petty captain of a militia corps was left to act at his own discretion. In one case the guns were leveled to fire on the multitude without any notice to warn the people of the danger; and it was by a mere accident that a bloody fray

did not take place, which, if once begun, would have put us in mourning for many a day. Old Boston has rather a relish for rebellion, and when it lay in the path, as it seemed to do here, it required some restraining grace not to pick it up. . . . I am told the government was quite willing we should dip our fingers in rebellion. It knows it cannot have any support, and for that reason would be very glad to put us in the wrong with the rest of the country. The Nebraska business has called up a feeling which, though not Free Soil, or Abolitionist, is so near akin to them that they can all work in the same harness."

It is, in truth, in Prescott's English correspondence that we find the workings of his mind on American politics most clearly revealed. At one time, he is enlisting the sympathies and receiving the contributions of English friends in behalf of a slave — presumably a fugitive. At another, he is discussing with the Duke of Argyll or with Lord Morpeth the fatal drift of slavery towards the extinction of human rights. Not immediately upon these themes, but on others which, after

all, were kindred with them, a couple of unpublished letters are of interest: —

TO R. C. WINTHROP

May 30, 1847.

Everything has gone well for you here, no extra session of Congress, and none like to be. We ride on conquering and to conquer, as you see, up to the very Halls of Montezuma, and many, I should think from the positive manner they speak of them, expect to find the palace of the old Aztec still standing. The Mexicans have missed it in fighting pitched battles instead of trusting to a guerilla warfare. My friend, General Miller, who has much experience of the Spanish-American character, told me that the guerilla was the only way by which they could fight us with success; and if they pursued that system they would be invincible. They may trouble us yet in that way; but the capital and seaports seem destined to come into our hands. But what shall we do with them? It will be a heavy drag on our republican car, and the creole blood will not mix well with the Anglo-Saxon. Then there

will be the slavery question as a firebrand which will keep you hot enough next winter in the Capitol.

TO C. CUSHING

BOSTON, April 3, 1848.

MY DEAR SIR, — I should sooner have thanked you for your friendly letter from the environs of Mexico. You are in a position for an accurate comprehension of my narrative and the subject of it. And I shall be very glad if the result does not lead to the detection of greater inaccuracies than those you have pointed out.

You have closed a campaign as brilliant as that of the great conquistador himself, though the Spaniards have hardly maintained the reputation of their hardy ancestors. The second conquest would seem *a priori* to be a matter of as much difficulty as the first, considering the higher civilization and military science of the races who now occupy the country, but it has not proved so, — and my readers, I am afraid, will think I have been bragging too much of the valor of the old Spaniard.

I hope we shall profit by the temporary possession of the capital to discover some of the Aztec monuments and MSS. The Spanish archives everywhere, both public and those belonging to private families in Old Spain and in the colonies, are rich in MSS., which are hoarded up from the eye of the scholar as carefully as if they were afraid of the facts coming to light. Of late these collections have been somewhat opened in the Peninsula. But such repositories must exist in Mexico, and Señor Alaman, formerly minister of foreign affairs, has communicated some to me and made liberal use of others in his own publications. If you meet with him you will see one of the most accomplished and clever men in Mexico. But I hear he was in disgrace a year since from his royalist predilections. Could you oblige me by saying to him if you meet him, that I am very desirous to send him my "Conquest of Peru," and if he can let me know how to do so I shall do it at once with great pleasure. Have you met on the spot any of the Mexican translations of my "Mexico"? The third volume of one of them contains and is filled with

engravings taken from old pictures of the time of the Conquest, at least so it purports. This edition alone contains also some very learned and well-considered criticism on different passages of the work. I trust that your military duties and dangers are now at an end, and that Mexico will accept our propositions for peace. It has been a war most honorable to our arms, as all must admit, whatever we may think of the wisdom of the counsels that rushed us into it.

CHAPTER XVI

"PHILIP II"

"You have had," wrote Dean Milman to Prescott, in 1852, "I will not say the good fortune, rather the judgment to choose noble subjects." This was in connection with a friendly inquiry how Philip II was getting on. That last, and as it proved, unfinished work, if it had a noble subject, was the occasion of revealing nobility in the author. As the "Conquest of Peru" links Prescott's name with Markham, the "Philip II" does with Motley. The story is well known. Motley made grateful public acknowledgment of the generous encouragement and sympathy which he received from the older historian. Going to him with a proposal to abandon the field in which the younger man had not known that Prescott was working, the beginner was rather urged warmly to continue his own researches, and was offered every aid, including the loan of books and

manuscripts, within the power of the writer of established reputation. It was a fine example of passing on the torch of learning. As Motley wrote appreciatively to Prescott from Paris, in 1857, it was only a proof of the latter's "untiring benevolence." He had previously written from Florence, in 1855: —

"I thank you very much for your very handsome allusion [in the Preface to "Philip II"] to my forthcoming work which I am sure in America at least will be of much value to me. I hope you will take the trouble to read the work when it appears (a copy will of course be sent you) and that you will not be ashamed afterwards of having complimented me on trust. It is so much the fashion for literary men and artists generally to look upon any man in the street who is trying to get into the omnibus as an intruder, and to bully him with assurances that there is no room for him, that I feel most sensibly your courtesy in trying to make a place for me at your side, however, unable or unworthy I may be of your kindness."

Prescott came early to have a high estimate of Motley's powers. In a letter to Allibone,

referring to one "whose path crosses my own historic field," he said, "I can honestly bear my testimony to the extent of his researches;" and added, with a touch of genuine criticism, "every page is instinct with the love of freedom." One recalls Motley's letter to his father, expressing the patriotic satisfaction it gave him to "pitch into the Duke of Alva and Philip Second to my heart's content." Two such differing natures as Prescott's and Motley's excellently illustrate the personal equation in the writing as well as the reading of history. Dr. Holmes observed: "Those who have known Motley and Prescott would feel sure beforehand that the impulsive nature of the one and the judicial serenity of the other would as surely betray themselves in their writings as in their conversation and in their every movement." Motley himself shrewdly remarked on this diversity of temperament in writing to Prescott about the first volume of "Philip II:" —

"I think there can be no doubt of the success of the work and that it will stand as high as (or even higher than) any of your other

histories. I can vouch for its extraordinary accuracy both of narration and of portrait painting. You do not look at people or events from my point of view, but I am therefore a better witness as to your fairness and clearness of delineation and statement. You have by nature the judicial mind, which is the *costume de rigueur* of all historians. *Non equidem invideo miror magis* — for I have n't the least of it — I am always in a passion when I write and so shall be accused — very justly perhaps — of the qualities for which Byron commended Mitford, 'wrath and partiality.' Thus far you are very just to my idol, William the Silent, a man whom it has been the fashion for Catholic and Calvinist canters to blacken for three centuries. Pray don't rely, by the way, too much on Groen van Prinsterer's good opinion of Philip II. He is more of a Jesuit than Father Strada, and a Calvinist monk is the most mischievous of all. *Cucullus non facit*, etc. I allude of course to his opinion of Philip himself — not your history of him, which I feel sure that he will appreciate as highly as it deserves. I earnestly

hope that you will have plenty of time and health and eyesight to go on with the succeeding volumes of your history, and do not doubt that they will be as brilliant and as masterly as these two. No one will welcome the following ones more than I shall do."

Professor Allen of Wisconsin University thought that Prescott was somewhat "lacking in indignation." He could not rival Motley in pitching into Philip. His own Philip was voted by Sir William Stirling-Maxwell to be, so Motley wrote to his wife, "altogether too mild and flattered a portraiture of that odious personage." On the other hand, Prescott thought Motley too hard on Philip. This appears in the letter which he wrote to the author of the "Dutch Republic" in April, 1856: —

BOSTON, April 28, 1856.

MY DEAR MOTLEY, — I am much obliged to you for the copy of the "History of the Dutch Republic" which you have been so kind as to send me. A work of that kind is not to be run through in a few days, particularly by one who does his reading chiefly through

his ears. I shall take my own time therefore for going thoroughly through the book, which I certainly shall do from beginning to end, notes inclusive. Meantime I have yielded to my impatience of seeing what sort of stuff it is made of by pitching here and there into various places, particularly those with which I am most familiar myself and which would be most likely to try your power as a writer. The result of a considerable amount of reading in this way has satisfied me that you have more than fulfilled the prediction which I had made respecting your labors to the public. Everywhere you seem to have gone into the subject with a scholar-like thoroughness of research, furnishing me on my own beaten track with a quantity of new facts and views, which I was not aware it could present to the reader. In one passage I remember, the sack of St. Quentin, you give a variety of startling and very interesting particulars, and when I envied you the resources at your command for supplying them to you, I found they were all got from a number of the "Documentos Inéditos" which slept harmlessly on

my shelves from my own unconsciousness that it contained anything germane to the matter. Your descriptions are everywhere graphic and picturesque. One familiar with your romances will not be surprised at your powers in this way. But yet, after all, the style for history is as different from what is required for romance as that of a great historical picture is from a scene painting for a theatre. You prove that you possess both. Your portraiture of character is vigorous and animated, full of characteristic touches, from a pencil that is dipped in the colors of the old masters.

You have laid it on Philip rather hard. Indeed you have whittled him down to such an imperceptible point that there is hardly enough of him left to hang a newspaper paragraph on, much less five or six volumes of solid history, as I propose to do. But then you make it up with your own hero, William of Orange, and I comfort myself with the reflection that you are looking through a pair of Dutch spectacles after all. As to the backbone of the work, the unfolding of the great revolution, I am not in a condition to criticise

that, as no one can be who has not read the work carefully through. But I have conversed with several, not merely your personal friends, who have done so, and they bear emphatic testimony to the power you have exhibited, in presenting the subject in an original and piquant way to the reader. Indeed you have seen enough of criticism, probably, from the presses of this country and of England, to satisfy you that the book has made a strong impression upon the public mind and that it must be entirely successful. There is one little matter which I have heard quarreled with, and which I must say I think is a mistake, but which relates to the *form* not to the *fonds* of the work — that is, the headings of the chapters and the running titles of the pages. They are so contrived as to show the author's wit, but nothing of the contents of the book, and have the disadvantage of giving a romantic air which is out of place in history.

But this sort of criticism you may very well think is like praising one for his intellectual, his moral [qualities], and all that, and then taking exception to the cut of his waist-

coat. You have good reason to be pleased with the reception the book has had from the English press, considering that you had no one particularly to stand godfather to your bantling, but that it tumbled into the world almost without the aid of a midwife. Under these circumstances success is a great triumph. . . .

With my kindest regards to your wife, believe me, dear Motley,

Very sincerely yours,

WM. H. PRESCOTT.

Like all Prescott's histories, "Philip II" was long meditated. As early as December 6, 1845, his journal betrays incidentally where his thoughts were turning. "I have the great reign of Philip the Prudent to prosecute." This was while the "Conquest of Peru" was still in hand, and was adduced as one spur more to press him on to its conclusion. Later entries yield glimpses of the progress of the work: —

March 1, 1848. . . . "Being thus relieved of all further solicitude in respect to the success of my last historical bantling, what re-

mained for me but to turn at once to my rich mine of 'Philip II'?" . . .

May 20, 1848. "Read carefully Ticknor's MS. 'History of Spanish Literature' — a most thorough, scholar-like performance and important contribution to letters. Read also — i. e. listened to — an ocean of newspapers — the staple of the day — the age of revolutions. What next?" . . .

September 9, 1848. "[Pepperell.] Now cannot I Philippize in these shades?" . . .

October 27, 1848. "The last three weeks have been lounging through the purlieus of my subject. Is it to be mine?" . . .

February 15, 1849. "I must economize time by taking only the best authorities and the MSS. The last I must *approfondir* — the true ammunition for the historian to fight his paper battles with. . . . If I do not make sensible progress, I shall have no heart to go on at all. After skimming along on a railroad as I did in 'Peru,' how can I feel enthusiasm when limping like a blind beggar on foot? I must make my brains — somehow or other — save my eyes and my time too." . . .

September 2, 1849. "Never so happy as when fairly under weigh in composing. . . . One great drag on me is the pain writing occasions in the urethra, etc. . . . But *pazienza* — I must learn that at least from my Spaniard."

November 25, 1849. "Mem. Whining about my troubles unmans me, and is of itself the worst augury. Making light of these — quiet energy, justifiable self-reliance, cheerful views of life are the best guarantees of success as I have hitherto succeeded. I *will*."

September 14, 1851. "I have no right at fifty-five to say *solve senescentem equum*. I have still a course to run over, and a good plate to win . . . even though I have a touch of the blind staggers." . . .

October 14, 1851. "I now enter on . . . the story of the Netherlands, — a fit subject for an independent history, as Motley will show the world before my limping volumes come out." . . .

July 4, 1852. "Letter just received from Bentley begs me to fix a time for its [my work] publication, but I cannot consent to become

the slave of the lamp — and of the publishers — as that would make me." . . .

"Left Nahant Sept. 6th, and came to the Highlands September 9, full of good intent. Delicious solitudes; safe even from friends — for a time! Now for the Spanish battle-cry, 'St. Jago, and at them!'" . . .

December 4, 1852. "St. Jago has not done much for me after all. The gods won't help those that won't help themselves. I have dawdled away my summer, and have only to show for it Chapter XII, thirty-five pages of text, and four pages of notes. Fie on it! I am now well read up for Chapter XIII, and — I mean to have a conscience and reform. We left Pepperell for town, Oct. 26th." . . .

February 2, 1853. "The reign of terror — I must not go to sleep over it — nor let my readers." . . .

March 20, 1853. "The last week revived the industry of the Peruvian — the golden age." . . .

July 30, 1853. "Yesterday fell asleep while Kirk read it [Chapter XVIII] to me for corrections. A good omen for my readers. . . .

Now for that exacting old dame, the Muse of History — who will not go halves with anybody."

The question of foreign copyright assumed some importance for Prescott on the eve of publishing his "Philip II." Motley, discussing with his father the wisdom of taking out an English copyright, wrote that, "It may be well for Mr. Prescott to do so, as he can sell his books for £1000 a volume or more." On September 14, 1851, Prescott noted: "The late decision in favor of foreign copyright appeals to my avarice, if my ambition should go to sleep; for it will put some thousands into my pocket." But later this hope was dashed, and he wrote: —

August 22, 1854. "In May, an English publisher, Routledge, made me the offer of £1000 a volume for as many volumes, not exceeding six, as I should write of 'Philip II' in case I could give him a good copyright; that is, if the case before the House of Lords on appeal should be decided in favor of foreigners. If decided against them, he agreed to pay me £500 a volume for these two first volumes, and

£250 for each of the following — for the advance sheets — I was to be allowed to propose these terms to Bentley — first, which I did, and they were at once accepted. The late decision in the House of Lords has gone against the right of foreigners, and all my dreams of copyright and all the title by which Bentley has hitherto had an exclusive copyright in my books have vanished into air. The sum, however, I am to receive for priority of publication is more in the case of the two first volumes than he paid me for the copyright of the two volumes of 'Peru.' . . . I have quitted the Harpers, and entered into a contract with the house of Phillips, Sampson & Co. of Boston. I have left the Harpers not from any dissatisfaction with them, for they have dealt well by me from the first to the last, but because they were not prepared to come up to the liberal offer made by the other party. We part, therefore, with the same good understanding in which we have always kept together. . . . I am to receive $6000 for each of the vols. of that work. . . . Also agree to pay me $6000 a year for six consecutive years for the right to publish

3000 copies of each of my former historical works."

The first two volumes of "Philip II" were completed on Augnst 22, 1854. On that date we find the customary *Laus Deo* in the journal. The composition, Prescott notes, had occupied him about five years. "I thought of calling the work Memoirs, and treating the subject in a more desultory and superficial manner than belongs to a regular history. I did not go to work in a businesslike style till I broke ground on the troubles of the Netherlands. Perhaps my critics may find this out." The usual task of revision and printing kept him busy for a year more. "Nothing remains now but to correct the earlier portions of the work, especially those relating to Charles the Fifth, in which all my new things have been forestalled since I began to write by Mignet, Stirling, etc., — a warning to procrastinating historians." The volumes were published in November, 1855. The result was a renewal and even enlargement of former successes. His own record, six months after publication, best tells the story: —

"A settlement made with my publishers here last week enables me to speak of the success of the work. In England it has been published in four separate editions; one of them from the rival house of Routledge. It has been twice reprinted in Germany, and a Spanish translation of it is now in course of publication at Madrid. In this country eight thousand copies have been sold, while the sales of the preceding works have been so much improved by the impulse received from this, that nearly thirty thousand volumes of them have been disposed of by my Boston publishers, from whom I have received seventeen thousand dollars for the 'Philip' and the other works the last six months. So much for the lucre!

"From the tone of the foreign journals and those of my own country, it would seem that the work has found quite as much favor as any of its predecessors, and, as the sales have been much greater than of any other of them in the same space of time, I may be considered to have as favorable a breeze to carry me forward on my long voyage as I could desire. This is

very important to me, as I felt a little nervous in regard to the reception of the work, after so long an interval since the preceding one had appeared."

Intercalated between the first two volumes and the third of "Philip II" came Prescott's continuation of Robertson's "Charles the Fifth." This was a sort of compromise. Prescott had been urged to undertake an entire work of his own on the reign of Charles. But his mind was filled with Philip; he did not desire to seem to be supplanting Robertson; and so he pitched upon a new conclusion of the latter's work, bringing it into harmony with the latest researches and at the same time furnishing an introduction to his own volumes on Philip. This labor he went through with his habitual fidelity, spending more than a year on the hundred and eighty pages. To Ticknor he wrote on December 8, 1856: —

"My 'Charles the Fifth,' or rather Robertson's, with my Continuation, made his bow to the public to-day, like a strapping giant with a little urchin holding on to the tail of his coat. I can't say I expect much from it, as the best

and biggest part is somewhat of the oldest. But people who like a complete series will need it to fill up the gap betwixt 'Ferdinand' and 'Philip.'"

An extract or two from his diary may be appended: —

August 6, 1855. "I am getting rather an ambling gait — as the papers called my gait in the streets — not even the butter-woman's trot to market. Fie on it!" . . .

October 28, 1855. "Boston is not Pepperell. The first day I dined with a large party. The second, at the theatre with Mlle. Rachel till midnight. This is not the way they lived at Yuste." . . .

June 4, 1857. "Rebellion of the Moriscoes, making in all 289 pages — more than half a volume! As bad as Macaulay — without his merits to redeem it." . . .

June 16, 1857. "Finished Battle of Lepanto. I hope it will smell of the ocean." . . .

September 27, 1857. "The subject will be a hard one. For it is easier to discuss battles than politics."

"Philip II" brought Prescott a full chorus

of praise. He was most touched, as before, by the appreciation of foreign scholars. Hallam and Milman and Macaulay sent warm congratulations. Sumner wrote from Aix-les-Bains :—

September 15, 1858.

. . . One day as I was halting through the street I observed a Frenchman busily occupied, as he walked, with a book which I recognized at once as one of your volumes. You know I am far-sighted, and easily recognize a friend. That incident made my walk pleasant, and I forgot my hurts.

From Castle Howard, his friend, Lord Carlisle, wrote : —

September 13, 1858.

. . . You are a brave fellow to stick to Philip, and I rejoice on every account to hear of such being your intention. I have had much pleasure this year in making Mr. Motley's acquaintance, but I wish to ask you confidentially whether you think he has been poaching at all on your manor ?

The best answer to this question, and the best way of closing a chapter in which, both at the end and the beginning, Motley's name should go with Prescott's, is to quote the explanation which the author of the "Dutch Republic" gave to his father: —

VEVEY, March 3, 1855.

We [Prescott and Motley] had a perfect understanding about our respective plans before I went away. I remember that he thought that it might be better if we should arrange to publish at somewhat different times, as the works are a good deal upon the same subject. As this is a consideration, however, which only affects me, as my work can't interfere with the sale of his, I have never thought it a matter of great consequence, particularly as I don't know, and never shall know, when I ought to publish. . . .

Philip the Second, although he is, of course, the *Deus ex machina* in much of my present work, is not my head devil.

I still mean to write to Mr. Prescott, but I thought I would send him this message through

you, for I would not have him think me forgetful of the many acts of kindness and friendship which I have received at his hands, and it is possible that he might wish to hear my plans.

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNFINISHED WINDOW

OPENING, in 1858, a new volume of the journal which he had kept for more than forty years, Prescott wrote on the inside of the cover, "Literary Memorandum Book No XIV — and, as I eschew long entries, probably the last." Less than three pages were actually written. The last entry of all was this: —

Pepperell, October 28. "Return to town to-morrow. The country is now in its splendid autumn robe, somewhat torn, however, and draggled by the rain. Have been occupied with corrections and additions to my 'Mexico.' On my return to Boston shall resume my labors on 'Philip,' and, if my health continues as good as it has been this summer, shall hope to make some progress. But I shall not press matters. Our *villegiatura* has been brightened by the presence of all the children and grandchildren, God bless them! And now we scatter again, but not far apart."

Prescott always labored under a physical handicap. In addition to his major disability, rheumatism seldom left off plaguing him. But there was, as an intimate friend noted, "a stoical element" in this gentle and smiling man, and he could whip a reluctant body along. A persistent local pain compelled him at one period to do a good deal of writing in a kneeling posture. The first really serious warning, however, came to him on February 4, 1858, when he suffered a slight stroke of apoplexy. He lost the power of speech for a time, and partly lost consciousness. His first articulate words disclosed the self-forgetful man: "My poor wife! I am so sorry for you, that this has come upon you so soon!" But the attack passed off, and his strength slowly returned. His own record of the affair was under date of April 18, and was as follows: —

"On the 4th of February I had a slight apoplectic shock, which affected both sight and power of motion, the last but for a few moments.

"The attack — so unexpected, though I had been troubled with headaches through the

winter, in a less degree, however, than in the preceding year — caused great alarm to my friends at first. Much reason have I to be grateful that the effects have gradually disappeared, and left no traces now, except a slight obscurity in the vision, and a certain degree of weakness, which may perhaps be imputable to my change of diet. For I have been obliged to exchange my carnivorous propensities for those of a more innocent and primitive nature, picking up my fare as our good parents did before the fall. In this way it is thought I may defy the foul fiend for the future. But I must not make too heavy or long demands on the cranium, and if I can get three or four hours' work on my historic ground in a day, I must be content . . . With prudence and the blessing of Heaven I may hope still to be in at the death of Philip, though it may be some years later than I had expected."

The rest of his life was passed in something of a shadow, though he never lost his light vivacity. How he could jest at his own wounds appears in this extract from a letter to his friend of many years, Madame Calderon.

Writing from Lynn on September 7, 1858, he said: —

"For myself, I have been very well of late, though, during the last winter, in February, I experienced, what was little expected, an apoplectic attack. It alarmed my friends a good deal, and frightened me out of my wits for a time. But the effects have gradually passed off, leaving me only a slight increase of the obscurity in my vision. As I don't intend the foul fiend shall return again, I live upon vegetables and farinaceous matter, like the anchorites of old. For your apoplexy is a dangerous fellow, who lives upon good cheer, fat and red-faced gentlemen, who feed upon something better than beets and carrots. I don't care about the fare, but I should be sorry not to give the last touches to 'Philip the Prudent,' and to leave him in the world in a dismembered condition!"

To his daughter-in-law he wrote in comic deprecation of his vegetarian regimen; one recalls Tennyson on FitzGerald's fare: —

"I must expect a little debility, as they have brought me to an anchorite diet of vege-

tables and the running brook, and I feel as light as air. These are not to be despised, are they? And I expect to become quite an epicure in spinach and potatoes. Nothing can exceed the bounty of my friends who send me all kinds of slops and hasty puddings, and volumes of receipts for different sorts of dainties in this way. I had no idea of the wealth of the vegetable kingdom."

With slackened, though never abandoned, researches in preparation for another volume on "Philip II," but with lowered vitality, he entered upon 1859. The closest observation foresaw no collapse. Ticknor, who, in 1855, had predicted that Prescott had "20 good years of work in him at 59," wrote to Hon. Edward Twistleton, on January 18, 1859, "Prescott is looking as well as ever, and his constitution has accommodated itself with wonderful alacrity to the vegetable diet prescribed for him eleven months ago." Yet the end was but ten days away. On January 28, parting with his wife in merry laughter, he went into his study. The blow fell swiftly; he was heard groaning; was found absolutely unconscious; and died in

a few hours. As grieving Motley wrote, "The night of time had suddenly descended upon the unfinished peristyle of a stately and beautiful temple."

Before burial, the body of Prescott was taken, in accordance with a request he had made, to lie for a time in his library. The best of all ages looked down upon him from their books; but not one of those "lettered dead" was manlier or purer than he. "All who knew him," said George Bancroft, "will say that he was greater and better than his writings. Standing by his grave, we cannot recall anything in his manner, his character, his endowments, or his conduct we could wish changed."

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